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MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS Y CULTURALES INGLESES Y SU PROYECCIÓN SOCIAL

WESTERN MONKEYS, EASTERN COYOTES

TRICKSTER STRATEGIES IN RESISTANCE.

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To my father, Steven Shan, in loving memory.

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Abstract

This MA thesis aims to explore how contemporary Native writers and diasporic Chinese American writers employ humor in their works through the archetypical figure of the Trickster, to articulate their resistance to racism and cultural stereotyping. By examining a selection of Coyote stories by Thomas King, a novel by Gerald Vizenor and a novel by Maxine Hong Kingston, and the ways they adapt their mythical Tricksters reinscribing them in a contemporary setting, and the way these writers juggle with words and meanings, I hope to further reveal their intentions to resist and contest hegemonic dominance. This thesis is divided into three main sections. First, the concept of Trickster as a mythological and universal archetype; second, the different deployments of this figure in contemporary Native literature, and third how it is treated in Chinese American literatures.

My thesis is that literary tricksters articulate the anxieties Native peoples and Chinese migrant communities experience in the United States and Canada, calling for them to rewrite their history and reject the assigned (mis)representation through humor.

Keywords: Trickster, humor, resistance, Native peoples, Chinese diaspora

1. Introduction

However remote, every culture seems to have among their ancient lore a figure that sums up contradiction and ambiguity, a figure so powerful as to have come down to our times. These characters test and trespass the limits of their cultures in a perpetual search for something else, be it power, knowledge, achievement, sex, or love. No rules govern these figures but their own, or the adaptation and twisting of the mores and social rules of the culture they belong to, to their own interests. These figures are called tricksters, and they can wreak havoc around them. Havoc entails change, and any culture needs to undergo changes to survive and adapt to their ever-changing surroundings. Tricksters embody an attitude towards life that resounds within communities at tension in multicultural environments as is the case for Native peoples, suffering traumatic relocations, and diaspora caused by migration in Chinese migrants; to the point of being extensively used in their literary production to expose issues about self and communal identity, the preservation of their cultural heritage, and the dehumanizing effects of negative cultural stereotypes and racism.

The works analyzed in this MA thesis are Gerald Vizenor's *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, and a selection of Coyote stories by Thomas King: "A Coyote Columbus Story," "Coyote and the Enemy Aliens," and "The One about Coyote Going West." The reason why I have chosen these works is because their main characters are Tricksters that give voice to the difficult and complex experience of being part of communities that have underwent trauma and friction when being assimilated into a hegemonic culture. The short stories were included because the brevity of their structure calls for a more condensed way to deploy and weave humor into their narrative, while keeping that unity of effect that Poe conceptualized in his "Philosophy of Composition," in contrast with those that can be employed in a larger work.

I am myself, and have been for most of my life, at war with my perceived identity and in search of an unattainable ideal one, being a woman of Spanish and Chinese descent, and visibly racialized as such. These novels and short stories and their words resound at a very deep emotional level and engage my curiosity and my mind.

All the texts selected deal with reinscribing myths into contemporary literature, adapting mythical Tricksters by locating them in a contemporary setting, and with the way their authors juggle with words and meanings to resist and contest hegemonic dominance, transforming them into cultural heroes. Humor reveals itself as the means and the result of these semantic plays, helping deliver the blow, and provoke a reaction. My aim is to link these literary works with the labor of social activism against racism and cultural stereotypes they perform. Literary Tricksters articulate the anxieties Native peoples and Chinese migrant communities experience in the United States and Canada, allowing them to rewrite their history and reject the assigned (mis)representation through humor.

The methodology followed is comprised of two different lines of work. The primary sources were read and compared with those texts, articles and books dealing with Tricksters, Native literature, and Chinese literature. I was drawn to the work of Stuart Hall, in the field of Cultural Studies, especially on his views about cultural representation and diasporic identity which I found in books such as *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* and *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Whenever possible, I have tried to find articles written by the novelists themselves, dealing with their ideas and conceptions. This was especially important for me in the case of Thomas King and Gerald Vizenor, since I felt my previous knowledge about Native people was too limited. From then on, my research targets were academic articles dealing with Native literature and Native Studies, their points in common, their use of humor, their use of orality, and the rewriting of their Trickster, reinscribing them into our times. Academic websites such as ProQuest, JSTOR, MUSE, and the UNED library were extensively consulted and dug for information. The subscription of UNED to LION database has been extremely useful. Additionally, in the case of King and Vizenor, I had to research several concepts like *holotrope*, *interfusional literature*, *survivance*, *transvaluation*, and *transmotion* that were completely new for me. This leaning towards neologisms made me realize that their views as writers and activists were related with the semantic realm of Hall's ideas on cultural representation, discourse, and resistance. For the popular and widespread Chinese trickster, I have researched the origins of the myth of Monkey King, selecting besides an article by the translator of the Chinese original *The Journey to the West* hundred chapters' epic into a 4-volume work in English. As this MA thesis deals with two culturally different Tricksters, the works by Winifred Morgan and Hongmei Sun have been of great help, since both took the cross-cultural variation factor into light; the former more generally speaking and focused on the variety of tricksters to be found in American literature, and the latter more specifically focused on the Chinese trickster and his multiple rewritings. Another help towards cross-cultural variation was Keiko Kusamoto's MA thesis on reading Thomas King's "Coyote and the Enemy Aliens." The approach is that of comparative literature through close reading, in the intersection of Diaspora, Postmodern and Gender Studies, focusing on the resistance to hegemonic representation the different works offer. A cross-cultural approach was also needed in the case of Vizenor's novel, since his work mixes Native and Chinese tricksters. The bibliography has also taken into account the historical background to the claims of Natives and Chinese Americans to support my thesis of their use of comedic tricksters to reverse and contest racial stereotypes.

This introduction aims to offer a general view of what a Trickster is and how it can be found in different cultures, as well as to point out why these cultures would select a "hero" like a Trickster to give voice to their issues. Since the figure of the Trickster has no fixed gender, androgyny being one of their most salient characteristics, the tricksters springing from the plume of different gendered writers are gendered too. Separate sections will discuss the concept of the mythical Trickster, the short stories of Thomas King's Coyote – the selection comprises three different stories, in two of them Coyote is female while in the last one is male –, Gerald Vizenor's rewriting of Monkey King into a male Native shamanic Trickster, and the reversion of the former examples in the figure of Maxine Hong Kingston and her narrative about a second generation Chinese American male Monkey King.

Within the field of Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall articulated a theory of representation by which culture is constructed, conveyed, and maintained extensively through language. Culture is a common ground of *shared meanings* (1) that can be influenced by the hegemonic powers of any given time, in any given society, by using language and the meanings these powers build upon it. Language is representational and thus constructs realities that affect our environment and perception, it is pervasive, and a subtle means to control our mental conceptualization of the world. In this sense, representation through meaning constructed into language is an act of political power and dominance (Hall 5-6).

Folklore, understood as the complex baggage any given culture takes with them as it evolves and changes overtime, has relied heavily in oral storytelling to communicate religious beliefs, social rules, advice through cautionary tales, and entertainment. At a time where those cultures had not developed yet a written language, it follows that their own hegemonic power was exerted also through spoken discourse, in any style. But what happens when a culture is overpowered by other, resulting in an imbalance of power? Such is the case of Native people, forced to relocate ceaselessly, and not being considered citizens on their own right for centuries. Or diasporic communities, where full citizenship usually takes years to be obtained. A place for resistance was found in the interstices of the intersection of orality and written discourse, for that literature that uses the same hegemonic language to fight against the use of cultural misrepresentations of the Other. The term multicultural here is used taking into account that both Native peoples of North America and Chinese migrants belong to, at least, two different cultural sets of values that are not distributed neatly nor equally in a person, and which are at war with each other sometimes. Identity does not resemble an array of airtight containers but a multiplicity of layers that influence each other, or threads that weave a different pattern each time, and that may evolve in the span of a lifetime. In the case of minorities living in a Euro-Western society, layers are composed at large by their original provenance, by the mainstream culture where they are set against, and the stereotypes they receive/perceive as represented in that hegemonic sociocultural environment. As Hall described it in an interview with Julie Drew:

> Identity is always in the making … there is no final, finished identity position or self simply then to be produced by the writing. Any cultural practice plays a role in the construction of identity. While it's true that you may have a very clear notion of what the argument is and that you may be constructing that argument very carefully, very deliberately, your identity is also in part *becoming through the writing*. It's inflected by the very language you use because in order to express something, to occupy language, you are necessarily playing a game – a language game that other people have played and used. Meaning is already sediment in that language, so you reactivate all those other marks of meaning as well as what *you're* trying to say. Of course, writing is also a production, a production of knowledge and a production of a version of the self. (173)

In linguistic terms, multicultural people belong simultaneously to a multiplicity of systems where the relationship between signifier and signified is movable, dynamic, and dependent upon which social system they are at a particular moment. Communication between cultures takes place in spaces that have become "frontier spaces where discourse is multidirectional and hybridized" (Owens), and these spaces are also present in multicultural people not only in their physical appearance and the way they present themselves to the rest of the world but, most significantly, in their minds.

In their Introduction of *Theorizing Native Studies* (2014), Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith offer an overview of the state of the art regarding the different approaches Native studies are taking when it comes down to the theoretic field. There is an ongoing debate among scholars of Native studies about whether to engage theory or not; and how should Native studies engage with other fields (9). Postcolonial theory assumes that colonial control is a thing from the past in the case of the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (13); it could be argued that the indigenous population of those countries would not agree with that tenet, as certainly Thomas King does not ("Godzilla" 184-185). Some scholars, like Kevin Bruyneel, have engaged in postcolonial theory by addressing the site of tension as a *third space* of sovereignty, drawing on Homi Bhabha's term but defining it differently, as an alternative to the "false choices" of independence or assimilation. His point of view is that "there are not two sides in these conflicts but a complex interplay of wide-ranging and conflicting interests that determine the terrain of struggle" (14), which is exactly the same idea I have been exploring about identity and representation. But the choices to engage with theories are not only to inscribe Native studies into Postcolonial theory. Simpson and Smith's Introduction opens the door for new ways of exploring theorization in Native studies, demonstrating that the field is as active as it was decades back, and that we may see yet new developments and theories that could prove determinant towards resolving the issue of entrapment.

There is a huge field of research covering Native culture dealing with myths, history, reservation life and the forceful displacement of Native peoples in North American territory. As a result, the task to choose and select critical articles became paramount as I realized that, as an outsider to their culture, I would probably be biased towards the most romanticized or stereotyped representation of them. The work needed to be done inside out – I should have to be wary of my own shades while reading Native literature. As an added obstacle, my own condition as non-Native renders instances of their insider humor completely invisible to me, so I had to observe how their humor and their language games operate in me, deconstructing those stereotypes.

Between the extremes of the representations of Natives as "Noble Savages" or "Red Devils," the fear of miscegenation gave birth to a third, damaging, stereotype: the "half-blood" (Emmons 114–115). This pervasive negative stereotype usually represents an alcoholic mixedblood living off governmental and casino money, carrying in their blood the worst of both the white and the Native races. I found that another of these generalized stereotypes was that "Indians had no humor" (Baxter 40, and Emmons 125), one that resounded powerfully within me, recalling the "inscrutable Oriental" stereotype applied to Asian people and thus making the selection of authors more relevant for my research. Not a small number of studies and theses have been written about Native humor and the use they make of it; the conclusions, as expected if we think about human beings and not constructs or biased representations, are that Natives possess a fine sense of humor which is employed differently, depending on the situation; and that humor is used to denounce racial stereotyping and abuse. That is, humor is turned into a political weapon. The same can be affirmed of writers of the Chinese diaspora; cultural differences and their inevitable stressful relationships, as well as the enmeshed identity present in multicultural human beings are negotiated via humor with the same political intent. The research made through the different articles and chapters dealing with the figure of Trickster serves to affirm that there is a consensus about how this figure is commonly used by minorities to advance their political agendas.

The indigenous population in North America is designated differently in the United States and in Canada. In both countries, the old term for them was “Indians” - as a retainer of Christopher Columbus’ idea that he was looking for an alternative route to reach India. Nowadays this term has been relegated and the term Native American is preferred in the USA, while in Canada the equivalent is First Nations (King, “Prologue” xii). Different imperial powers colonized, first, their land, and later, gave birth to new countries, but they never took into consideration the indigenous population of those territories. Natives were consistently pushed away, cheated on in treaties, fought cruelly, and relocated in the worst plots of land while Euro-Western people became the hegemonic power, invoking what could only be described as the distorted interpretations of Judeo-Christian ideals and the construct of the manifest destiny. The result was that Native people were disenfranchised for quite a long time in North America. According to the Library of Congress website, though their right to vote in the USA was admitted in 1924 via The Snyder Act, it still took well over four decades for their right to vote to be accepted by the fifty states. The situation was similar in Canada. The *Indian Act* of 1876 legally defined who were Status Indians and Non-Status Indians (Lu viii). By 1969 they were granted equal rights, but in such a way that it meant losing the ancestral rights to their lands. Consequently, for Native peoples of Canada, the decision entailed whether to become a “full” Canadian citizen and thus to renounce their indigenous status (i.e., Status Indian), or to retain their indigenous status but not acquire Canadian citizenship (“Mapping the Legal Consciousness of First Nations Voters: Understanding Voting Rights Mobilization”). The Canadian *Constitution Act* of 1982 defines “the term “Indian” as [those] Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are not Inuits or Métis” (Lu viii). To be more exact, Canada legislation comprises three different categories: Status (or Registered) Indians, non-status Indians, and treaty Indians. The first one refers to those Natives registered as “Indian” under the Indian Act, and the third refers to those

Natives registered under the Indian Act that can prove to be descended from a Band that signed a treaty. The second category refers to people who identify themselves as Natives but fall short to fulfill the requisites of the first category; the direct consequence of this situation being they do not receive the same rights and benefits the Status Indians do ("Indians"). But Native writers do identify themselves in terms of tribal belonging, first and foremost: Thomas King defines himself as Cherokee though he writes extensively about the Blackfoot Natives (Gibert, "Stories" 262), and Gerald Vizenor, Anishinaabe. It is such an important issue that whenever one Native writer refers to another, they refer to their tribal belonging. Words matter, so for this MA thesis I will be referring to these two communities, meaning the ones from US and Canada, as Natives with the exception being done of quotations, where the original terms used by the authors will be preserved.

Regarding the Chinese diaspora, this community has been extensively represented as a model minority, one who tries to integrate as much as they can, and raise their voice seldom if not at all. The Chinese migrants started to reclaim their space in US history as they witnessed the Civil Rights and Black Power movements fight for the rights of Black people, prompting Asians to create a pan-Asian ethnic movement. Donald C. Goellnicht, in an article criticizing the reluctancy of Canadian academia to bestow on Asian Canadian literature the importance it should have, notes the "rapid rise" of Asian American studies by the end of the 1960s in the US, where a national pan-ethnic Asian American Movement developed (3). After the World War II the increase in numbers in Asian woman migration made possible that by the 1970s there was already a significant group of population of "North American born, native-English-speaking children, many of whom entered universities and colleges" (4) at the time where campuses where full to the brim with radical protesters. Successive Immigration Acts in 1965 and 1967 liberalized immigration from Asia and other countries, which meant the Asian population in the US increased while, at the same time, the social unrest led these communities to follow the example of and become allies with the Civil Rights Movement and with the Black Power. The student strikes at San Francisco State College and the University of California at Berkeley in 1968, together with the communal push being under way in Chinatown and Manilatown of San Francisco and Los Angeles, and Chinatown New York, fostered a strong pan-Asian movement. As Yen Le Espiritu noted, this year marked the first time "the term 'Asian American' was used nationally to mobilize people of Asian descent" (qtd.in Goellnicht 4). Asian American students became conscious of the pervasive nature of racism in America and how it affected their own lives, thanks to the example of African Americans and their demands (5). And ever since then, the Asian American community has struggled to debunk the pernicious effects of institutionalized racism in the US.

2. The Mythical Trickster

The figure of Trickster has been the subject of study from different points of view such as psychology, history, anthropology, and literary criticism, to name just a few. As stated in the introduction to this MA thesis, the archetypical figure of Trickster is ubiquitous, embodying characteristics that serve different purposes in different moments, becoming referential in a cultural system.

Paul Radin's seminal analysis on Native American mythology was published in 1955, compiling an extensive summary of tribal trickster cycles, and with dedicated chapters to analyzing the figure of the "primitive" trickster, their relation to Greek mythology – written by the classicist Karl Kerényi – and on the psychology of the trickster figure, written by C.G. Jung. As other scholars such as Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, and Winifred Morgan, they all agree in considering Trickster a universal figure. It has no fixed genre, transforming from a female to a male character as it is saw fit, whereas their most salient characteristic is their creative power. A power that creates and destroys (Radin 6) and that "is transgressive in the cause of creativity" (Morgan 4). In the words of Barbara Babcock-Abrahams:

> No figure in literature, oral or written, baffles us quite as much as trickster. He is positively identified with creative powers, often bringing such defining features of culture as fire or basic food, and yet he constantly behaves in the most antisocial manner we can imagine…
>
> Trickster and his tales exemplify this preoccupation … for at the center of his antinomian existence is the power derived from his ability to live interstitially, to confuse and to escape the structures of society and the order of cultural things. (147-148)

As a mythical archetype, Tricksters are usually identified with animals possessing human attributes. In Native tribal stories, it usually is Coyote or Raven, while the most popular among Chinese folklore is Monkey. Their creative, transformative powers acquire a much wider significance when paired with another trait of Trickster – namely, ambiguity – placing them "outside or between the boundaries of dominant groups for better *or* worse" (Babcock-Abrahams 150). These two characteristics are no doubt appealing to multicultural writers, since this ambiguity resounds with their own position as part of, and inside a dominant discourse, while at the same time being part of their own minority narrative. The pervasiveness of the trickster "parallels the growth of the ethnic literatures in America … multiculturalism has exploded traditional canons; and the borders and boundaries of "American" literature continually fluctuate and blur" (J. Smith xi-xii, Simal 142). And what is more important, these contemporary works "depict a chaotic, multilingual, many-layered world of colliding and overlapping cultures" (J. Smith xii), mirroring the cultural complexity of their authors. In order to survive, any culture needs to undergo changes while adapting to their surroundings; and this is exactly the case of Natives and diasporic communities. This is their way of coping with trauma and change, and communicating they are alive – contesting for example the "Vanishing Indian" trope.

Since Tricksters are ubiquitous, their nature and conception resist either homogenization or their being reduced to a lowest common cultural denomination. They can only make sense when analyzed or read in their cultural context (J. Smith xii), an idea also expressed by Doty and Hynes (15), Morgan (7) and Radin (7). Whenever a minority culture – at friction with a hegemonic one – appropriates the archetype of the Trickster to embody their struggles, this Trickster becomes a cultural hero for these minorities, one they can designate inscribed in their own cultural frame, and independent and free from the hegemonic culture's constrictions and schemes.

2.1. Coyote

As explained in the preface to *A Coyote Reader*, within Native mythology the Coyote is a powerful figure, a member of the First People, mythic prototypes akin to gods that created the world as we know it (Bright xi). Native stories present a cosmogony which differs from the mainstream Judeo-Christian tradition, in the sense that there is a dialogical nature in the former that the latter lacks. Native conceptualization of the world comes through dialogue, being their vocabulary and genre conventions those of oral narrative, ceremony, and visual representations (Ridington 346).

The Okanagan writer Mourning Dove, in her *Coyote Stories*, narrates the act of naming the creatures as her people have known for centuries. In the beginning, Animal People populated the earth and prepared the world for the New People. As part of this preparation, they had to be named properly. The Spirit Chief told them that by the next day they would be assigned a name forever, a name that would be passed onto their descendants, and be given a work to do. They were to come to his lodge the following day to be named in a first come-first served basis. Coyote, not liking his name – "My people call Coyote *Sin-ka-lip'*, which means Imitator" (7) –, was intent on securing for him a name of great power. He planned to be the first in choosing a name and have his pick among the most powerful names. He boasted among the other Animals that he would be the most proud and strong Animal on earth and, having little or no friends because he was a know-it-all and because of "the foolish things he did and the rude tricks he played on people" (18), he went back to his family and prepared himself to stay the night awake. Much as he tried, he fell asleep and arrived late to the Spirit Chief's lodge, so late that there was only one name left: Coyote; this is a terribly ironic twist of the story that holds a great truth about being what one is and not another. Seeing his despair, the Spirit Chief told him that he must keep his own name and reveals what is in store for him. Coyote has important work to do before the New People come, and he would be chief of all tribes. He would stop the *En-alt-na Skil-ten* – People-Devouring Monsters – and conquer them. Significantly, the Spirit Chief describes his contradictory personality: "For doing that, for all the good things you do, you will be honored and praised by the people that are here now and that come afterward. But, for the foolish and mean things you do, you will be laughed at and despised. That you cannot help. It is your way" (23). But to help Coyote prevail, the Spirit Chief bestows on him the shifting power or "*squastenk'* … It will do much for you and with it you can change yourself int any form, into anything you wish" (23) and onto Fox, his twin brother, the power of *shoo'-mesh*, or the power to rescue Coyote from death; his bones may be scattered but just with one hair of Coyote's body left, Fox could bring him back to life. Together with this account of the naming of all creatures, Okanagan people also explain why Native people possess certain physical features: "After that day his eyes were different. They grew slant from being propped open that night while he sat by his fire. The New People, the Indians, got their slant eyes from Coyote" (24).

Coyote is then, though a trickster, a fundamental actor of the cosmogony and mythology of Native peoples, being at the same time a creator and a destroyer. Though Morning Dove presents Coyote as a male being, the archetype of Trickster is eminently androgynous, so different narratives will have a female Coyote instead of a male one. Significantly, the Chinese Monkey King can undergo several transformations, and his hairs have magical powers too.

2.2. Monkey King

A beloved popular figure in China, Sun Wukong is better known as the Monkey King. He is a character of the late-Ming epic novel *The Journey to the West,* a hundred-chapter narrative – in its unabridged version – written in the manner of "sessions of story-telling taking place in tea houses" (Mao 2), that functions as a metaphor on different levels relating the quest of enlightenment, under the pretext of bringing Buddhism to China (Pearson 357). The pilgrimage was ordained by Buddha, supervised by Guanyin / Kuan Yin,[1] commissioned by the Tang emperor, and ultimately performed by Tripitaka and his Pilgrims (Yu 18), of whom Monkey is the one that acquired much fame because of his restless intelligence, martial and magical prowess, and nearly endless resourcefulness (Yu 27). This character has such an importance in the narrative that the epic opens with seven chapters entirely dedicated to his birth and life until he meets Tripitaka (Yu 26).

Sun Wukong had a miraculous birth: at the top of the Flower-Fruit Mountain, in the country of Aolai, there was an immortal stone that was impregnated by the "seeds of Heaven and Earth and by the essences of the sun and the moon." The stone gave birth to a stone egg that, by the eroding force of the winds, was transformed into a stone monkey "with fully developed features and limbs" (Wu 101). After proclaiming himself Handsome King of Monkeys, this witty and sometimes bad-tempered monkey sought different ways to achieve, first, immortality by erasing his name and all the names of all the monkeys from the Book of Yama (Sun 15); secondly, a Heavenly status by admitting himself into Heaven to demand a place for him there; and thirdly, a Buddha status when accompanying Tripitaka in a journey to the west (Sun 16), to bring the Emperor some especial Buddhist scriptures. His training enabled him to metamorphose into seventy-two different shapes. His body hairs could be transformed into whatever thing he may need, and he carries a Golden-Hooped Rod that increases and decreases in size at Monkey's will, that he hides inside his ear. His mind, wild and eccentrical, runs the risk of losing focus so Tripitaka controls his mind rantings thanks to the Golden Fillet constricting Monkey's head, a remedy devised by goddess Kuan Yin.

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[1] These are alternative spellings for the Chinese Goddess of Mercy; Yu and other Chinese scholars use the spelling *Guanyin*, and Gerald Vizenor and Maxine Hong Kingston use *Kuan Yin*.

His ability to move through different realms at leisure meant that he could achieve horizontal and vertical social mobility. It is not strange, then, that different minority communities have been drawn to this character because of his endurance, commitment to the communal cause, and the ability to resolve problems in an imaginative way. He is a figure especially appreciated by the Chinese and the Chinese Diaspora community, since "he is simultaneously the one and the other, dual contradictions within one body" (Sun 18). Besides, his metaphorical journey to the West has been mirrored by Western authors returning his myth and rewriting it under different guises, appropriating parts of it, to drive their points home – becoming a transcultural icon. The measure of his popularity is the wide range of media and genres that has him as inspiration and rewritings, from the traditional Chinese opera to novels, films, TV serials, video games and manga comics, both in Eastern and Western culture.

3. Native Trickster Stategies in Resistance

The trickster is comic in nature in a language game.
(Vizenor, Prologue to *The Trickster of Liberty* x)

The relationship concerning Native peoples and literary criticism opens a discussion around the theories of Postcolonialism since Native tribes were never colonies depending on an imperial power. Thomas King addresses this dissenting view in "Godzilla vs Postcolonial," taking issue with the term itself since it proposes the arrival of Europeans in North America as the starting point of postcolonial theories about Native literature. That is, organizing theories about Native literature while at the same time relying heavily on Eurocentrism, telling the story from the point of view of Euro-Western history and thus making everything related to Native literature appear as depending solely on the relationships derived from that encounter:

> While post-colonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, the term itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America. At the same time, the term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. No less distressing, it also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic. (184-185)

The most dangerous implication regarding this postcolonial stance is, in King's opinion, that its practice effectively cuts off Natives from their long-standing traditions and promotes the reductionist view about contemporary Native literature as deriving exclusively from the relations of oppression: "Ironically, while the term itself – post-colonial – strives to escape to find new centres, it remains, in the end, a hostage to nationalism" (185). It becomes clear that King is resisting and opposing the Euro-Western ethnocentrism, the "representation" in Hall terms, being operated by the word "post-colonial"; a rejection of the hegemonic discourse as applied in this case, to Native literature. Consistently through his works, Thomas King contests these assumptions, deconstructing "history" as it has come down to us in the hegemonic discourse, just as American fiction was trying to do to disembody itself from the Eurocentric canon and find its own voice, as Hutcheon notes, by signaling its dependence by its *use* of the canon but asserting rebellion through ironic *abuse* of it ("Historiographic Metafiction" 12).

In the same spirit, in the Prologue to *The Trickster of Liberty*, Gerald Vizenor describes his views about the tribal trickster, the work of the contemporary Native writer and the obstacles that must be surpassed to successfully convey the intended message and no other, to the conscientious reader. His thoughts on the matter of the tribal trickster, contemporary Native literature and Native culture in general are usually articulated through neologisms of his own coinage. The concept of the "tribal trickster as a comic *holotrope* (x), proposes an independence of meaning of the figure of the trickster that, at his hands, becomes at the same time signified and signifier, "a wild venture in communal discourse, an uncertain humor that denies aestheticism, translation, and imposed representations" (x). One of the most important aspects of Vizenor's works is that they demand the complicity of the reader, that must engage actively to become an "obverse trickster":

> The active reader implies the author, imagines narrative voices, inspires characters, and salutes tribal tricksters in a comic discourse; an erotic motion under the words absolves the separation between minds and bodies.
>
> Words, then, are metaphors, and the trickster is a comic *holotrope*, an interior landscape "behind what discourse says." The trick, in seven words, is to *elude historicism, racial representations, and remain historical*. The author cedes the landscape to the reader and then dies, the narrators bear the schemes, bodies are wild, and the trickster liberates the mind in comic discourse. (Prologue xi)

Once more, we are encountered with language games. For the tribal trickster to properly operate, it needs that the oral narrator (author/writer) commits their words to paper, their oral discourse must be carefully planned so it would elude the trap of historicism, conscientiously steering away from racial representations, while at the same time remaining historical; all to avoid being lost in translation, and to become alive in the imagination of the reader that would act as the other side of this comic trickster – while bearing in mind the same seven words trick - to remain an active reader and not impose an outsiders' worldview on the perception of what they are reading (x-xi).

3.1. Thomas King's Coyote

Thomas King describes himself as a Canadian writer and a Native writer of Cherokee, Greek, and German descent, that is, a mixedblood whose identity has been formed as part of the modern urban Native minorities inscribed into the hegemonic culture. Perceptions of oneself in these environments are tricky, as he himself explains in *The Truth About Stories* about being raised in Roseville, California: "Racism is a funny thing, you know … The guys I ran with looked at Mexicans with a certain disdain. I'd like to say that I didn't, but that wasn't true … while I was looking at Mexicans, other people, as it turned out, were looking at me" (37-39). His intentions as a Native writer are quite straightforward, if we take into account how open he is about them in *The Truth About Stories*, a book compiling his five 2003 Massey lectures broadcasted by the CBC, and *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. His last book, *Indians on Vacation*, has been awarded the 2021 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour, a fact quite telling. With his peculiar, humorous, and open way of tackling those issues that he considers seldom broached about the reality of being a person of Native descent in our times, he takes the trouble to deconstruct for his audience the way history and anthropology have presented the story of Native

Americans – served with a strong and unbending Euro-western authority to our days –, while offering a different perspective on long-set ideas about historical events and results of legislative measures undertook in the USA and Canada. In doing so, he practices, as Margaret Atwood describes, ambushing the reader with a peculiar sense of humor that allows him to "get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their moral righteousness, but by being funny" (244). His work entails a personal deconstruction as well, in order to effectively articulate the deconstruction in simple terms to be easily grasped by the audience, and he does not hesitate in explaining his own personal experiences in a pedagogical way. In these short stories, he tries to bring back to life the experience of the *interfusional literature*, where the typical Native voice of the storyteller, together with their traditional themes and oral discursive devices are fused into the English language and written down, being transformed into written narratives (Gibert, "Written Orality" 4). His written style replicates the interferences of bilingualism as a huge part of the characterization of the narrator, recalling to the reader the stereotyping signal of how Natives are supposed to speak English, but appropriating the demeaning stereotype to acquire agency in the story through humor, while at the same time upsetting the balance of power between the imposed English language and Native peoples' languages, thus conferring orality a destabilizing power that counter colonialist impositions (Gibert, "Written Orality" 2). Thomas King's stories are truly "voice pieces" or hybrid texts that transform oral speech into the visual figuration of the printed page (Gibert, "Written Orality" 6), and prompts the reader to read them out loud – thus closing a circle of creation in the style of his much-admired Harry Robinson (qtd.in Gibert, "Narrative Strategies" 73). Another technique used by Thomas King in his "voice pieces" is to contain an embedded story inside a frame story, as it happens in the three short stories selected "A Coyote Columbus Story," "Coyote Going West," and "Coyote and the

Enemy Aliens," where the narrative voice is the one that tells both stories (Gibert, "Revisions" 247).

3.1.1. "That is one sad story"

"A Coyote Columbus Story" is written in a direct, oral style that resembles oral narration (*interfusional literature*), challenging the more academic style an average reader would expect, by using non-standard English grammar. This short story appeared first as an illustrated children's book that was very much criticized in the quincentennial anniversary of the Discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus (Gibert, "Subverting" 388). The language is casual, informal, right from the opening: "You know, Coyote came by my place the other day. She was going to a party." The party, of course, was the said anniversary. "It is a party for Christopher Columbus, says Coyote. That is the one who found America. That is the one who found Indians." Together with "It was a history book. Big red one" (121), the words signal how the historical events are presented to different social groups, emerging from the dominant one and being taken as an immovable Truth. It will be the Native storyteller, and no other, the one that will set History right. What follows is a narration of how Old Coyote, as a creator, made everything out of nothing by performing a ritual composed of singing, dancing, and thinking. This is a simple description of what it has come down to us as a popular representation of sacred Native indigenous ceremonies, an image that has been set on the mainstream imagination through their repetition in pictures, novels, and movies to the point of being deprived of their real significance and importance in Native culture. King raises a mirror to non-Native readers, where our shallow and devoid of deep meaning stereotypes concerning their sacred ceremonies is reflected: we are offered our own misleading and incomplete concept of Native sacred rites. Coyote´s love for playing ball got her performing her creation rituals "and pretty soon along came some Indians" (122). But

Trickster will be trickster, and Old Coyote liked to play and change the rules of the game to her benefit. Tired, the Indians went about being themselves: fishing, shopping, going to the movies, going on vacation (King 122). This enumeration of activities, with their patent anachronisms, sets forth another mechanism of resistance: Native Americans are not just a plurality of tribes set into a fixed period, like statues in a museum (Emmons 8) or illustrations in a history book, but real people doing things real people do. The Vanishing Indian trope is subverted via these anachronisms with efficient and exquisite subtlety.

Left to herself, Old Coyote gets bored, and sings, dances, and thinks about playing ball, and about changing rules (123). Her thinking-creation act becomes muddled and, instead, she creates "three ships" that stand for La Pinta, La Niña y La Santa María; "people on the beach with flags, funny-looking clothes and stuff," representing Christopher Columbus and the crew from the three ships; all looking for China, i.e., searching for an alternative route to the East to circumvent the Portuguese monopoly of the sea route at the time. These people are looking for things to sell like gold, silk, portable color televisions, and home computers (123-124). Enumeration and anachronisms are at play once again, revealing the reason behind the discovery of the New World, and hiding under the surprise provoked by the evident anachronisms the sting of the social critique – how the colonization of Asia has been profitable for the dominant group: valuable goods, big workshops with cheap labor, and lower production costs of state-of-the-art technology, and its relationship with the colonizing of the New World. The predatory nature of these visitors made them steal Indians away to sell them to recover the costs of the trip, leaving Old Coyote alone. "Boy, says Coyote. That is one sad story. Yes, I says, it's sad alright. And things don't get any better, I can tell you that" (125-126), as we all know by now.

With simple, direct short sentences, in his signature orally written style or *interfusional literature*, King deploys the dark side of the encounter of Christopher Columbus and the aboriginal population of the New World, and hints at the following centuries of suffering at the hands of Euro-western newcomers into those lands. The ending of the story contests the Vanishing Native stereotype (Emmons 129) with optimism or, at least, realism by asserting the presence of Native peoples nowadays in the new continent and emphasizing the negation of said stereotype: "Those things were never lost, I says. Those things were always here. Those things are still here today" (127).

Twenty years after "A Coyote Columbus Story" was published, King takes the denial of this piece of history one step further. In the first chapter of his book *The Inconvenient Indian*, very appropriately titled "Forget Columbus," he expresses his views on historical representation, drawing on how history has been told/represented, and confronting it with facts and figures. There is an ironic and somewhat angry overtone on the chapter, finely tuned down by negations and dismissals. But the fact remains that after one seemingly nonchalant dismissal comes another confrontation of history, facts and figures that revise not only Christopher Columbus' discovery but Pocahontas, several massacres reportedly committed by Indians (verbatim), Little Big Horn, and the Hudson Bay Company among other moments of the canonical history. Columbus just happened to come ashore in the Caribbean in October 1492, and he was given credit for discovering the Americas while the award could have gone to the Norse or the Asians instead. "History may well be a series of stories we tell about the past, but the stories are not just any stories. They're not chosen by chance" (1-2). What would have happened if the story chosen had been that the Norse discovered the New World? Or the Asians? Would anything had been different for the Natives? It is clear that canonical history has established a point (the discovery) that King rejects actively and purposefully in his works.

3.1.2. “All about who found us Indians”

In “The One about Coyote Going West,” we are encountered again with Coyote and a Native narrator of shifting gender, as grandmother and grandfather are used by Coyote to talk to them: “You are very wise, grandmother, Coyote says … Oh, grandfather, that Coyote says” (71). Displaying a game of doubles, different interplays are set in the text for the reader to go through: history and story, an old Coyote and the present-day Coyote, and a narrative voice that shifts when being represented by the trickster-Coyote, which is maker and destroyer. Language is casual, like the dialogue one would strike up when talking to a friend and sharing what has been happening lately. The present-day Coyote has stopped by at the narrator’s house while travelling west to meet her friend Raven, tell stories, and fix the world up – which usually means trouble. “I been reading those books, she [present-day Coyote] says … All about who found us Indians” (70), and we readers presume they are history books. The narrator then encourages her to tell the story, which unfolds as follows: Eric The Lucky and the Vikings came to play hockey for the Oldtimers and found the Indians in Newfoundland. Christopher Cartier also found the Indians while searching for food in a restaurant in Montreal. Jacques Columbus came along a river and the Indians welcomed him, saying “here we are, here we are.” The narrator, as in the previous story, stresses that they were there by chance: “Eric The Lucky and that Christopher Cartier and that Jacques Columbus come along later. Those ones got lost” (70-71). As Archer-Lean points out, the trope of ‘being lost’ is consistently transformed into ‘being found’ to the advantage of the whites in any first contact narrative (50). Together with King’s recourse to anachronism, in this story we also have a deliberate mixing up of historical facts. “Eric the Lucky” would be Leif the Lucky, and his father Erik the Red, both Vikings that were part of the Greenland Eastern Settlement, from where they sailed to North American territories (Oleson). About the incongruence of their coming to Canada to play hockey for the Oldtimers, one would ask who the Oldtimers are, anyway, and why hockey. A settlers' sport and for seniors, at that. Another meaning arising for the term *oldtimer* besides somebody connected with a club or an organization, is somebody who has lived in a place, for a long time. The implications would be that they are the same as the settlers, but at the same time reclaiming the term by signaling to those living in Canada for a long time before then, and that in the times of Vikings Eric and Leif would have been the Native people and no other. The blending of historical facts also reaches the discoverers Christopher Columbus, in the name of the Kingdom of Castile, and Jacques Cartier (Trudel), in the name of the Kingdom of France. Why would Columbus be in a restaurant in Montreal, being a place discovered by a rival power? Their surnames appear muddled, signaling that for Native peoples the discovery of America by the Europeans was not as important as for the Euro-Western culture; maybe that the possibility of being discovered by one kingdom instead of another would not entail a significant difference on the following events, in terms of results for the Natives. The image of a group of Natives waiting to be discovered on the margins of a river and saved, as if they were marooned (as the words "waved and say here we are" seem to suggest), lends a bitter ending to the otherwise absurd combination that cannot fail to put a smile on the reader, and that is masterfully woven into the narrative to the point of passing under the radar in a leisure reading of the text.

The narrator contests the story Coyote is telling, and the undercurrent of meaning anchored to the Euro-western tradition, by saying the Natives were the ones to rescue the discoverers that had been lost, treating them fairly, being hospitable to them to end with "Boy. Bad mistake that one" (71). The price of helping the people who got lost was the suffering Natives experienced later at their hands. When asked who discovered the Indians, the narrator says that everybody knows it was (an ancestral) Coyote. What follows is a creation story inscribed in the Native mythology in which Coyote travels the earth and creates what she thinks it is needed or lacking. But the first thing she creates is a mistake, a big and terrifying mistake that turns the tables on her, so other creatures like the ducks make fun of her. Several topographical accidents appear though personified: a river, a mountain, which would be good on their own, but Coyote finds fault in them and thus employs herself to fix them. The river must have rapids, rocks, waterfalls and run in one direction. The mountain needs to have peaks, cliffs, and snow (76). Through these actions is clear that Coyote, who in the words of Mourning Dove was the one to help the New People, is creating obstacles for them. A dialog between the present Coyote and the narrator ensues as an instance of how the sense of entitlement works and how Native teachings are served. Discussing why the ancient Coyote is trying to correct the flowing of the river and the shape of the mountain, the narrator questions the contemporary Coyote why she thinks the former changed those things:

> Maybe it's because she is mean, I says.
> Oh no, says Coyote. That one is sweet and kind.
> Maybe it's because that one is not too smart.
> Oh no, says Coyote. That Coyote is very wise.
> Maybe it's because she made a mistake.
> Oh no, says Coyote. She made one of those already.
> Alright, I says. Then Coyote must be doing the right thing. She must be fixing up the world so it is perfect. (77)

Trying to correct her mistake, that has become a physical entity and is roaming the earth on their own and performing creation acts as well, ancient Coyote travels West, where she finds piles of snow tires, televisions, vacuum cleaners, and several other items of consumer goods (77-78). A list of appliances that nobody would expect on an era where everything else was still on the making. Her mistake is reading from a big book, a department store catalog – and not a history book, setting a humorous difference with present day Coyote and the books she has read. Each product Mistake enunciates appears out of thin air, and lands accumulating in piles around a bewildered Coyote. When Coyote begs Mistake to stop, the answer is: “These are good things … We need these things to make up the world. Indians are going to need this stuff” (78). Seeing that there are no Indians around, Mistake looks them up in the catalog to order them, but of course Indians are not an item from a department store (79). We are encountered again with this jab about consumer goods that refers to the predatory activities of mass production, contamination and labor exploitation, and commodification of societies including the Native ones, caught in the capitalistic rush of Western societies; a social criticism that is deployed disguised as an impossible anachronism. Coyote cannot create the Indians either, and four ducks – the sheer absurdity of it – come to the rescue, laying eggs and joining forces with big Mistake and Coyote to sing and dance with their eyes closed to create the Indians. The sacred rituals of song and dance are interrupted every time by Coyote who, feeling hungry, tries to devour the ducks, until the dance is modified so the ducks can keep an eye open to “help Coyote with this dance,” and of course ensure their own safety (79-80). The eggs hatch and open, showing the ducklings inside; then the laying of the eggs, the song and dance are repeated seven times until the ducks that came to the rescue say: “I guess we got to be the Indians,” transforming into two women and two men who are not too pleased about their new condition as humans (81-82). Before ending, King writes some lines that may refer to the patronizing, civilizing zeal and the overexploitation of natural resources: “That’s what it happens when you try to fix this world. This world is pretty good all by itself. Best to leave it alone. Stop messing around with it” (82). The end of the story recalls the cyclic structure of Native stories: if Coyote was going to the West to fix the world, and the narrator was telling Coyote a story of how Coyote went West to fix the world, we – readers – are trapped by the circularity of the story, made patent by the narrator saying: “So, Coyote drinks my tea and that one leaves. And I cannot talk anymore because I got to watch the sky. Got to watch out for falling things that land in piles” (82). The surprise is served, thwarting our expectations, and the story ends at the point of repeating itself, breaking the barriers of time and space and getting ready to be told again, as Native stories usually are.

3.1.3. “A good Canadian story”

In “Coyote and the Enemy Aliens” Coyote is going West once again and stops by the place of our anonymous Native narrator. The time is deliberately uncertain at the beginning: “That was in European time…1940. Maybe it was 1944. No, it was 1942,” and changes into an affirmation in the following line: “Coyote comes to my house in 1941” (51). European time, our narrator signals, is of no importance to him, destabilizing the balance of power between the imposed time frame and Native conception of time. This calculated hesitancy stops when the date is settled to 1941, and a deeper layer of meaning is revealed. This year saw the Japanese Canadians aged over 16 being fingerprinted and registered by the Royal Mounted Police,[2] and required to carry identification cards – in effect until 1949, and the start of the impounding of Japanese Canadian fishing boats by the Canadian government. Pearl Harbor was attacked in December the same year, marking the moment of the formal entry of the US – previously in a neutral position – into World War II. Starting February 1942, several orders-in-council were passed that affected severely the lives of Japanese Canadians from then on.

While reading the newspaper, Coyote finds a job. The narrative gets momentarily suspended by a direct interaction between the narrator and the reader, a resource King will employ throughout this story quite a few times, engaging further the attention of the reader and activating a surprise factor by breaking the fourth wall:

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[2] See, for instance, https://japanesecanadianhistory.net/historical-overview/visual-timeline/

> Maybe you're wondering who would hire Coyote.
> I thought so.
> Okay, I'll ask. (51)

The answer is "The Whitemen are looking for a Coyote," followed by an immediate access to the thoughts of the narrator: "Oh boy. Coyote and Whitemen. That's pretty scary" (51). The Second World War breaks out, and "All of a sudden, everyone is fighting. Mostly those White people. They like to fight, you know" and, to make things worse, Native peoples are being involved: "Even some of us Indians are fighting" (53). Here King alludes to a stressful time when Native people were included in mandatory military training and conscriptions, violating the promises made by the Canadian government, and having the doubtful honor of defending citizenship rights that were denied to them, and fighting for the country that denied them those rights (Sheffield). Of course, Coyote is not fighting but working for the government in the forceful removal of Japanese Canadians from the Canadian Pacific Coast and their internment, under the Order-in-Council P.C. 1486 of 24th February 1942 (Timmons 39), that first relocated them in the interior of British Columbia. After this order, the amendment of the Custodian Enemy Alien Property followed, effected in the Order-in-Council P.C. 469 of 19th January 1943. This order enabled Canadian government to sell the property of the Japanese Canadians without the consent of their rightful owners (Robinson), with the exemption made of "deposits of money, shares of stock, debentures, bonds or other securities or other property which the owner on being evacuated from the protected areas was able to take with him" (*Order-in-Council P.C. 469*, 1-2). The Enemy Aliens, that is, the Japanese Canadians, were being 'evacuated' and their property being held in what it was supposed to be a bona fide governmental custody. These terms are used as euphemisms for 'prisoners' and 'confiscation'. Both orders are referred to in the story, the first with the appearance by our narrator's place of Coyote with a talking truck labeled "Kogawa Seafood" (53) that claims Coyote has stolen him and embarks on a recurring and heated argument with Coyote that kept "everyone awake" for weeks (54).

The truck is a direct allusion to Joy Kogawa and her novel *Obasan* (1981). Joy Kowaga was actively involved in the Redress Movement in the decade of the 1980s, a movement which sought to secure the legal reparations for the Japanese Canadians affected by governmental policies during the Second World War (Bennet and Brown 731). On 22nd September 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney formally acknowledged the Japanese Canadian community's wartime human rights violations and announced symbolic individual redress payments for each living Japanese Canadian expelled from the coast in 1942, or to those born before April 1st, 1949 ("Japanese Canadians Redress Movement"). The heated argument reflects the controversy caused by the adopted war measures, heating the public opinion, and originating public protests on the side of the Japanese Canadians and on the side of non-Japanese Canadians, as well as riots.

The second truck appears with a paper of the said "Order-in-Council 469" and our Coyote, by now transformed into the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property (55). The job, and by extension the laws and the government, are successively contested by the narrator voice, implying how they could not be viewed as truthful, nor reliable, nor fair, nor generous (55-56). Taking the measure to also point at the similar treatment of people of Japanese descent in the United States, King introduces a second truck with the inscription "Okada General Store." Okada, besides being one traditional Japanese surname that was found on British Columbia that could also be found in the US, hints to Japanese American writer John Okada, author of *No-No Boy* (Lee, and Kusamoto 45), a novel about the Japanese resistance and more exactly, the Japan American Citizens League forcibly silencing the novel (Chin 53). The different stages of Enemy Alien removal are faithfully and chronologically depicted in

King's story,[3] from the confiscation of the whole fleet of Japanese Canadian fishing boats to the Japanese Canadians' aggrupation and internment in Vancouver's Hastings Park livestock barns (57), their dispersal (64), internment (65), and lastly, Coyote's involvement with the atomic bombs by finding another job in Los Alamos, New Mexico, where the bombs to be used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were developed (69).

There is, anyway, an obvious detachment from the events depicted in the narrative made by its main character: "No, no, says Coyote. This story is not a good Coyote story. This story is a good Canadian story" (58). Though this Coyote works for the government, it is the Canadian government and not him the ones making history through their deeds. The narrator expresses his doubts by saying "Canadian story. Coyote story. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference." The narrative darkens in tone and exposes the ethical conflict by reciting a series of words beginning with C, besides Canadian and Coyote, all negative: "Callous, carnage, catastrophe, chicanery … Cold-blooded, complicit, concoct, condemn … Condescend, confabulate, confiscate, conflate, connive … Conspire, convolute, crazy, crooked, cruel, crush … commendation" (58-60). And the political criticism is overt, especially when followed by the words that can be made up thanks to the White magic word *legal*: "Patriotic, Good, Private, Freedom, Dignity, Efficient, Profitable, Truth, Security, National, Integrity, Public, Prosperity, Justice, Property" (59). There is a telling contrast about the semantic fields between the first selection of words and the second, far beyond the second being all capitalized, and that confirms that by making use of a different perspective or labelling (representation, in short) discourses can be made to look much more important and nicer than what they really intend under this meaning in disguise. Referring to the episode of the removal of Enemy Aliens, the narrator resorts again to enumeration, this time with words starting with "dis" and capitalized as well: "Disdain, Disappear, Distress, Disaster, Disillusioned, Disappointed, Disingenuous, Distrust. Disperse" (62) all of them implying negative terms allusive to Canadian policies at the home front, and their pernicious effect on Natives and Japanese Canadians.

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[3] For a detailed timeline information, see https://loi.uvic.ca/narrative/timeline.html?initialized=true

As the story unfolds, the Native narrator and their friends liken the dire straits the Japanese Canadians are experiencing to their own: "You know, Billie Frank tells me, this story about the Enemy Aliens have their property taken away by Coyote and the Whitemen and get moved from their homes to someplace else reminds me of another story," showing Native peoples recall their past traumas when they bear witness to a similar treatment being exerted on another minority (64). The issue of disenfranchisement of the Natives from Canada is also mentioned in relation to the unpaid labor the Japanese Canadians will be forced to do, to prove they are loyal citizens, a sinister irony in itself: "Boy, I tell Billy Frank, those citizenship tests are tough. What's a citizen? says Billy Frank" (66). In his book *The Truth About Stories*, King discusses his views on governmental policies regarding the Native population, both in Canada and the USA, affirming that "legislation, in relation to Native people, has had two basic goals. One, to relieve us of our land, and two, to legalize us out of existence" (129), a denounce of intersectional racist practices that fall squarely in the field of study of Critical Race Theory. For him "Canada, which is generally seen as lagging behind the United States in most things – capitalism, taxation, aggression – actually took the lead in legislating Indians out of existence with the 1876 Indian Act" (131), thus bestowing on Canada the dubious distinction of being the one of the two countries to take the initiative in the dishonorable path of racist policies.[4] By force of the Indian Act, any Indian with a degree, that served in the military, became a lawyer, or a clergyman would automatically be enfranchised, and lose their condition of Indian. Breaking the legal stipulations to their immediate, direct effects on the Native population, he ponders that either one or the other approach to the Indian question was equally disastrous.

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[4] More information on the Indian Act at https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/

Racism is also denounced in this short story: “Enemy Aliens don’t mind that smell, says Coyote. They are not like you and me. They look like you and me, I says. Oh no, says Coyote, you are mistaken. They look like Enemy Aliens” (60). Here King is playing games on three levels. The first one is the idea of supremacism; in this part of the story Coyote and narrator are referring to the stench of Hastings Park, where the livestock barns where located. The words of Coyote strip the Enemy Aliens of humanity, implying they are animals and thus, they would not mind the animal smell. The second is that they effectively look “like you and me” because of the genetic component that accounts for a phenotypical similarity between Natives and Asians. And, beyond that, onto the third level of meaning, the one pointing at how human beings are equal and race just a construct. As luck would have it, the tables turn on them and the RCMPs start grabbing everyone they see, Natives included since they look like Japanese Canadians, to be relocated somewhere else on a reenactment of the Trail of Tears or Indian Removal Act: “And pretty soon that Coyote has that pretty good truck filled with Enemy Aliens, and that one has that pretty good truck filled with Indians … And just then the RCMPs grab that Coyote. Enemy Alien” (67-68).[5] Caught in the game of difference and the construct of race, and mistakenly taken by Japanese but also implying his being a Native, Coyote is thrown in the truck and exits under the accusation of being an Enemy Alien.

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[5] More information on the Trail of Tears / Indian Removal Act at https://guides.loc.gov/indian-removal-act

"Coyote and the Enemy Aliens" is also included in a collection of Native short stories titled *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past*, where it appears preceded by a note from its author. Thomas King states in it how injustices are known but, as it usually happens, "In pieces. From a distance" (158). Much as we would prefer to not acknowledge it, historical facts do have a double edge: they provide us with the knowledge about something that has happened, but it does so in a sort of hygienic, chirurgical way that makes it easier to be assimilated by the receiver. We know it as a cold fact: numbers, research, scientific magnitudes that explain what happened, while the why usually has at least two sides to it; but the human side of it, what it really meant to the people experiencing it first-hand is never fully replicated in the receivers. It is knowledge comfortably tucked in detachment, as a fragile piece of art on a box. Pieces. Distance. We may be sympathetic, but we will never experience it in the same way. And whenever Thomas King recalls the story of the Japanese interment and relocation in Canada, he inevitably remembers how Natives have been treated by the Canadian government. They are just two examples of many of the stories of injustice in the world's history, where "hatred and greed produce much the same sort of effects, no matter who we practise on" (158).

3.2. Gerald Vizenor's Eastern Coyote

Gerald Vizenor is an American writer of Anishinaabe and Swedish-American descent, and an enrolled member of the White Earth Reservation. He is also one of the most acclaimed scholars in Native studies and literature, and his critical output has served to integrate the methodologies of the non-Native canon with one specifically Native, together with his coining of words that describe the specificity of the Native literature. The force of a traditional myth such as The Monkey King from the Chinese folklore serves to articulate Gerald Vizenor's novel *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, where the main character undertakes a parodic inversion of *The Journey to the West*. In the Chinese novel, Monkey King travelled from China to the West (India) to obtain the most sacred Buddhist scriptures, bring them back to the Emperor of China, and thus guarantee the settling of Buddhism in China. In Vizenor's novel, a Native American Trickster named Griever de Hocus travels to the East (China) to teach in Tianjin University and, after being revealed to him in a dream, to search and bring back to his reservation the ancient scrolls of his people.

There are several references in Vizenor's novel, apart from the title, where the inspiration on the Chinese epic is evident, transforming the novel into a parodic "Journey to the East and Back". This parody is calculated and meets the definition of parody by Linda Hutcheon: "a form of imitation … characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text …is repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (Introduction 6). As it is, there exists an ironic inversion since the journey of the trickster is Eastbound instead of Westbound, it is about a non-Chinese American Monkey King experiences in China, and it narrates in repetition but with a critical and cultural distance the Chinese classic epic. Griever is a Monkey King imbued with Native trickster characteristics because, besides being a mixedblood Native, he possesses shamanistic powers that manifest themselves in dreams that anticipate some of the events that will happen later in the novel. The novel draws also on Vizenor's personal experiences as a teacher at Tianjin University, as he himself explains in the epilogue of the novel. Until then, no Native character had been depicted as a university teacher; this is not to say that there were not Natives holding those positions at a university, only that they had not been represented as such in literature. Gerald Vizenor opened a new path in Native American literature, and other Native writers followed suit, for example Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris with *The Crown of Columbus* (1991). When in Tianjin, he attended Chinese opera and realized that "the Chinese trickster had for centuries played exactly the same role as his tribal counterpart" (Helstern 136). Tianjin, as Shanghai, was a Chinese city which fall prey to foreign concessions after the Opium War in 1842 and the subsequent Nanking Treaty. The Treaty opened China to Western trade in extremely encumbering terms that, in conjunction with other deeper social and cultural issues, rendered China a fragile, fragmented country submissive to foreign powers, and fueled further the social unrest that, a century later, culminated in the Chinese Revolution of 1949.

The novel opens with a letter signed by Griever de Tianjin – dropping Hocus for the Chinese city – on his first night in the city, to China Browne, who happens to be a Native woman, niece of a friend of him. China Browne, besides, has an uncanny attraction towards bound feet. In this start(l)ing game of meanings, China stands for a country, a race, the savage in the Oriental Other via bound feet, and a Native American woman. The following chapter takes China Browne to Tianjin, to inquire after Griever and his strange disappearance the previous summer, a jump in time narrative that contests the linearity of the chronology, and the unity of discourse with the shifting of the point of view allowing for the fragmentation of information, tenets of postmodernism. The chapter also reveals a deeper insight into the theories of the trickster as devised by Gerald Vizenor, and its importance is underlined by a rewriting of the same chapter, a year later, in his book *The Trickster of Liberty. Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage*. This chapter also discloses several of the events that would unfold later in the novel.

3.2.1. Cultural Palimpsests and Survivance

In *Postindian Conversations* (93), Vizenor describes *survivance* as a "standpoint, a worldview, and a presence" that stems from two words: *survival* and *dominance*. Defining *survival* as a "dependency on the cause of some action" and *dominance* as the "historical prominence" of the conditions that caused survival, he advocates the term *survivance* as the survival and resistance to the dominance, avoiding the *victimry* trap the mere survival will cause, since this kind of survival is implicitly linked in a relationship of subjugation to dominance. As it happens, Griever carries with him as a shaman-trickster, a survivance existence and a point of view that finds an echo in the city of Tianjin, in the common people of People's Republic of China. Tianjin, first a colonial city thanks to foreign nations that exerted their erasure on the Chinese culture, has been wiped off and striped down of its old names with the advent of the new, Communist regime. The original culture of the country has been further erased and written over the remains of the colonial *grandeur*. The buildings remain but holding those activities the government decides, the streets and parks are renamed and only those who then lived there can remember how it was in old times. The People's Republic of China modelled a new identity for the country and imposed it on its citizens, many of whom had to be re-educated to fit into the new country. Traces of the ancient culture are regarded as belonging to "old superstitious peasants" (61), subject to scorn and frowned upon; and need to be controlled, as for example by the rewriting of traditional operas including myth of the Monkey King (Helstern 143). Drawing on his personal experience as a teacher in Tianjin, Vizenor explains in the epilogue of the novel that the references to the foreign concessions map were made thanks to an old copy he found in the guest house at Tianjin University, and that his undergraduate students answered his questions about the concession map with silence (236). Griever moves through Tianjin with such an old map, reading the city as a palimpsest where "Colonial names were removed from directories, and common maps became state secrets" (111). Fox understands that Griever use of this historical map is a way of signifying that capitalism has returned to China (73), since the novel is rife with criticism towards the kind of socialism operating in China. Pearson (365) also notices the open critique to modern China. But beyond that socioeconomic criticism, historical facts are taken down with a joke and there is an undercurrent of empathy towards the common citizen who is still remembering old stories from the past. One instance of this strategy is when Griever is reading about the Tianjin's orphanage of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul where in 1870 ten nuns (and two Lazarist priests)[6] were cruelly tortured and killed under accusations of witchcraft by the implicitly pagan mob (109-110), an inversion of the witches' trials undertook by the Saint Inquisition or the Salem Trials. The detailed description of that event is followed immediately by an incongruent "Griever was astonished that the other missionaries survived that night; but he was even more surprised to find apple pie on the menu in the old colonial hotel restaurant" (110). The juxtaposition of these two different and seemingly unrelated events brings forward the *elude historicism* but *remain historical* strategy explained in *The Trickster of Liberty* (xi), exposing the doubts about any missionary escaping death that day as to be a reliable witness to the historical event, contesting the canonical history, and the fact that there were at least two priests killed among twenty-one foreigners, and an estimate of thirty to forty Chinese converts (Tian, 209). He orders apple pie at the restaurant, where he tries to engage into a deep conversation about state and colonization with a waitress that only wants to practise her skills with the English language.

With this palimpsestic reading, Vizenor implies that any community, not exclusively the Native people, can experience and practice *survivance,* in spite of the dominance that may be subjugating them, which in the case of China were first the foreign powers and later, the totalitarian regime that followed; as Vizenor sees it, "the irrepressible power of life is always stronger than any force established to control it" (Helstern 136). Due to this double erasure, some characters appear to us as old / ancient or out of place in the novel, generally overlooked by the cadres, the rest of the teachers, and their own fellow citizens. This is the case of Wu Chou and Hua Lian. Wu Chou is described as a warrior clown (19), who in his youth was an actor famed by his interpretation of the Monkey King in *Havoc of Heaven.* When age made impossible for him to keep up with the acrobatics, he turned to study the stories of the shamans and the tricksters in several countries abroad but, when he returned to his country to teach, was banished by the communists to a political prison farm. Years later and oh the irony, past his age of retirement – so he would not be able to pollute the intellects of any student –, he was acquitted and accepted a place into a janitor's position (23). He was, after all, a Monkey (Pearson 367) and accepted the job of opening the gates to a place of knowledge, becoming the gatekeeper of Zhou Enlai University. I personally find this metaphor quite poignant. Wu Chou's strategy, trickster-wise, has been to s*urvivance*-d "old but seldom stooped" (19), still cladded in his blue opera coat, in charge of opening and closing the gates of the university, and starting "the world there now and [measuring] the thin cracks in his memories at dawn" (24), a subdued Chinese Monkey King trickster but still a warrior in his own way. As he explains to China Browne:

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[6] See also "Patterns behind the Tientsin Massacre," by J.K.Fairbank. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2718360

> Tianjin is a broken window … Dreams retreat to the corners like insects, and there we remember our past in lost letters and colonial maps, the remains of foreign concessions. Look around at the architecture, the banks and hotels, the old names have disappeared but we bear the same missions in our memories. (25)

Maybe because he had studied the shamanism and tricksters in other countries, Wu Chou is able to recognize Griever for what he is, a "holosexual mind monkey," a being who "loved the whole wide world" (21) and becomes his friend and ally. They could understand each other at a level implicitly out of reach for the teachers or the cadres, as it is made clear when Hannah recalls how she had once found Griever screaming on panic holes: "he told the man from the guest house [Wu Chou] that he screamed into a *hai pa* hole to balance the world … the little man seemed to understand and the two of them laughed all the way back to the guest house" (70). Wu Chou explains to China that Griever could endure many things "but not the foreign affairs bureau" (22) and, by extension, the policies of a new country so stepped up in laws and repression. The recognition between these two similar characters, one brought down by the system though not broken, and the other one dancing on the edge of the same system highlights also how the vanishing trope, the assigned representation, strives to erase real life from people regardless of place, time, and race; and how their stories of *survivance* need imagination, to keep on living. Vizenor observes that the notion of the "vanishing tribes" is an intrusion that reveals racialism and the contradictions in humanism and historical determinism ("Trickster Discourse" 282). As Griever affirms, "Imagination …is what burns in humans. We are not freeze-dried methodologies. We remember dreams, never data, at the wild end" (32); that is, our imagination, and not an assigned taxonomy or representation, is what makes us real and human. Thus, the way certain people are represented as Other, is "bad television" (28), a clumsily crafted image created for cultural consumption. This is a real dagger to the way the visual media has contributed to amplify the construct of the Natives and Chinese (Asians in general) by extension.

Another character who defies China's new order is Hua Lian (Pearson 369), the blind verger woman of Victoria Park "who paints her face red and white, and who has refused to alter her memories from the concessions to please the new masters and shadow capitalists" (111), and whose conception of the world is in line with that of Griever: the erasure of colonial names to be substituted by numbers is an issue with her since numbers are "blind, and repeated, not imagined" (112), not real life as Griever posits. As a student of the Nankai Middle School in Tianjin, where Zhou Enlai – first premier of the PRC – and Wu Chou also attended, she was known as Hua Ci or "painted word" (112), describing a particular condition of acoustic synesthesia that allowed her to remember total conversations and visual details from several perspectives, a sixth sense that she now uses to picture the past and recount conversations (112), most notably, of her past as a student protester and as a friend of Zhou Enlai. Her denial to abide by the new number place names is overlooked by the authorities "because her blindness was seen as an inner exile, an eternal prison in a new land" (113). As a character in the novel, she is practicing palimpsestic readings of China's history, Tianjin city's history and experiencing *survivance*. Most significantly, her "lucid interior visions were not altered in word shadows or the revolution," and what she remembers "cannot be measured in the politics of names or the philosophies of written grammars" (113); her visual and acoustic memories cannot be trapped or altered by hegemonic discourses and political language; she is outside the PRC's representational games, transforming her into a veritable trickster on her own. "The trickster is an encounter in narrative voices, a communal sign and a creative encounter in a discourse", explains Vizenor ("Trickster Discourse" 286), and as such, these three characters (Griever, Wu Chou and Hua Lian) encounter as narrative voices, creating a bigger communal sign wherever one voice (usually the predominant, which is the omniscient narrator) gives the floor to another, creating new nexus that enrich the narrative, enhances the trans-communal and widen the scope of the meanings.

Another instance of cultural palimpsestic reading is the way in which Vizenor threads his knowledge of the myths of Native trickster *naanabozho* with his knowledge of Chinese myths and legends and the Monkey trickster, as Lisa Lizut Helstern explores in "*Griever: An American Monkey King in China*: A Cross Cultural Re-Membering." Operating as *naanabozho*, the market liberation of chickens is a rewriting of the dancing ducks' story. Griever, having witnessed the killing of a cockerel and two hens at the market, finds himself compelled to free the rest of the caged birds, amounting to one tethered rooster and seventeen hens (*Griever* 35) and after some considerable amount of persuasion and bargain, helped by Jack and Sugar Dee, Griever buys the liberty of the birds. As Helstern points out, instead of ducks dying, every bird – except the first three – lives (138). The story of *naanabozho*'s sending his penis across the lake to have intercourse with the chief's daughter is rewritten in the first night Hester and Griever have sex (139); and the flight on the back of the turkey buzzard becomes the escaping from China in an ultralight plane (138). All this re-memberings of the Native trickster, besides, are subverting the original myth in a significant aspect of the story (137-139). Conversely, as Helstern explains, Wu Chou recalls to mind "the elders responsible for the conduct of Native American tribal rituals and the religious training of younger men" (145); Hester Hua Dan is at the same time Venus coming out of the sea foam (139), the scarred bride of a Tang dynasty legend, the Chinese Moon Lady, and the Jade Rabbit (149-150); and Kangmei the Chinese Horse-Head Lady (149). The novel's time frame is set into Chinese seasonal cycles that reverse exactly the Native winter period, when traditional stories are allowed to be told (151). These are just some of the examples that give us the measure of the powerful and complex reading that Vizenor deploys in his book, with layer over layer of significance that enhance and subvert other meanings simultaneously, and that become obscured to those readers who do not have such deep knowledge of both cultures.

3.2.2. Thresholds and Transgressions

The omniscient third person narrator allows the reader to have first-hand information about the inner thoughts of the different characters and acts also as a cameraman lending a filmic quality to the novel, taking us from scene to scene, breaking the timeline to dive into the past, or to bring dreams and Griever's imagination into present time. Sometimes the focus shift to Griever's point of view via his epistolary correspondence with China Browne. At other times, the prose derives into a stream-of-consciousness, allowing the story to flow at a different pace. The shifts are surprising and the weaving of the shamanic dreams into reality sometimes run the risk of being unperceived in the first reading, proving the narrative trickier than it seems, a proper trickster narrative playing games on the reader. Humor runs throughout the novel in different ways. Sometimes is surreal, sometimes is gross, sometimes is sarcastic. It is always in a constant flux, hidden undercurrent, and surfacing where one least expect it. All these strategies are also textual thresholds we are crossing thanks to the artistry of Vizenor as a storyteller.

The Trickster hops in and out frontiers, able to move from one part of the boundary to the other, and capable of inhabiting the area in between. The ideas of boundaries, frontiers, and liminal spaces are present in the novel in words that evoke them like "border" (13), "cleaves" (27) "cracks" (for example in 14, 24, and 27), "seams" (27), and "scars", a word appearing first on page 20, mentioned twice on consecutive paragraphs on page 27, and on pages 28-30, to number just a few. The attraction Griever feels towards these places of friction comes from the pull of his imagination, imagining "stories about other people from their scars, prints, carved hearts, crude crosses gashed on trees …and from natural wrinkles, faults on faces and the earth" (27). The liminal is also present in the abundant references and recalling of dreams, signaling a trespassing of consciousness into unconsciousness but with the ability of retaining the dream images and evoking them back by daylight, standing in a threshold between one world and the other. In this sense, Griever is a shaman-trickster that can move at ease through different realms of perception and advance the narrative, infusing it with magical realism. Griever feels displacement as "the new sounds of this place hold [him] for ransom at some alien border" (13); as a trickster, his task is to "[move] back over culture lines, a shaman over the veils and hollow beams, … His friends listened to the trickster stories, moments pinched from hard realities, but did not understand those sudden reversals in time and memories" (32). Like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, but at the same time unlike her, he leans back on his heels and taps the toes of his shoes together, he pinches and folds one ear, and takes a hair from his temple (31) – the last two gestures are reminders of the powers of the Monkey King (Pearson 366) – and navigate through time and space in the narrative. The authorial voice proclaims his status:

> Griever is a mixedblood tribal trickster, a close relative to the old mind monkeys; he holds cold reason on a lunge line while he imagines the world. With colored pens he thinks backwards like a shaman, and reverses intersections, interior landscapes … Prevalent time and space are dissolved in ecstasies, but there is more to this trickster than mere transcendence. (34)

Scars are present, too, in the female characters that mean something to him like China Browne, a Native American whose scar shows when she smiles (20), and Hester Hua Dan, a Chinese woman he meets first by accident in the street and pursues actively over the first chapters after seeing the scar of her cheek (29). His first voyeuristic sexual experience had him enthralled with the vision of the scars on an anonymous woman: "he watched a white man … have sex with a small luminous woman; her breasts were scarred" (29), a fixation that seemed to link sexual pulsion and imagination, since scars spurns his imagination. The sexual component of the trickster, one of the traits identified by Babcock-Abrahams (159) is openly tackled in the novel. Griever humor sometimes leans towards sexual puns, as he makes sexual advances on nearly every woman he chances to meet, but he is rejected by all of them except Hester. Theirs is a tragic romance because she is the daughter of Egas Zhang, the governmental cadre that follows and spies on the foreign teachers, despised and hated by Griever from their first meeting. Without knowing who her father is, Griever feels attracted by Hester and she reciprocates. One of the reasons she feels attracted to him is his buoyant personality and his real interest in Chinese culture. Over her years as interpreter and guide for foreign teachers, she has grown tired about the topics she usually is questioned about, like "revolution, agricultural practices, abortions down on the farm, earthquakes, and classical literature, the examinations she had been trained to foresee as a translator" but

Griever, to her pleasure, “did not ask patent questions” (94). On a programmed teacher tour, he is more than intent in catching her attention, since all the stories he tells to the lower classes in the train – a paradox in a communist country – are intended for her (91); the more stories he tells, the more he catches her fancy, trespassing the cultural threshold of difference to the point that she moves to where he is to translate his stories from the traditional stories of the monkey king to her fellow citizens, thus bridging the language and comprehension barrier (93), weaving his stories into their Chinese cultural counterparts, acting as a cultural mediator (Pearson 366). As an added attractive personality trait, by this time Griever can write and understand some Mandarin, which bears proof of his authentic interest in getting to know better the culture of her country. This is made explicit to the readers because he draws ideograms in the palm of Hester and some children in the train (93), and by the way he starts to dream in Chinese (58). The relationship between Hester, whose name and scar evoke memories of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* – a marked woman – and Griever develops until they get sexually involved. Another trait of the trickster is present, because due to his “enormous libido without procreative outcome” (Babcock-Abrahams 159), Hester gets pregnant. In the country of the policing of sex and reproductive rights this is a transgression of everything proper and legal, and her father orders her to abort the child. Torn between fear, patriarchal duty, and national duty (200), she commits suicide on the same pond where many other unwanted babies were secretly drowned (225, and Evans 59) to comply with the nation’s one-child rule. At the end of the novel, Griever destabilizes the notion of Hester’s suicide, accusing Egas Zhang of committing murder (232-233), but nothing can be proved in one way or the other, leaving an uncomfortable feeling of anti-closure in the reader.

3.2.3. Parody and Racism

One of the most interesting interplays of humor and meaning is the one used throughout the novel by playing on racial stereotypes and how Griever reads China/country in terms of Native/non-Native dualities. On his first night, his first observation to China Browne is "This is an enormous reservation with a fifty watter over the main street" (13) alluding to the poorly lit city. He has been quick in spotting, as Evan (58) says, the similarities between White Earth Reservation and the oppressive Chinese society. Describing his first dreams about the silk road, Griever keeps seeing similarities: "this is hard to believe, but the figures and marks on the birchbark were the same as those on the tribal medicine scrolls from the reservation" (18). It also happens when he describes Tangshan while quoting from an official governmental bulletin in another letter to China Browne: "'Half the inhabitants are still living in small brick houses roofed with asphalt felt weighed down with bricks …' Sounds like a reservation back home, minus the bricks" (97). This last quotation, referring to the traumatic earthquake that caused the death of hundreds of thousands in barely twenty-three seconds, and how the Chinese government reconstructed the city – even if we make allowances to the Chinese governmental propaganda – acquires a more profound meaning and a bitter sting when paired with the comparison with US governmental attitude toward Natives.

As a foreign teacher and a Native American, Griever is caught in a double the stereotyping game. He is both the Other for the group of American teachers, a linguistic trap given that all the teachers are native teachers of English, and the Other for the Chinese. Besides, as a Native mixedblood, Griever seems to be passing for white – a fact that is just mentioned once in the novel. This comes as a surprise to the reader, who has been made aware from the beginning of his racial provenance (29 and 42, for example). Hannah

Dunstan, who declares that "my heart went out to him at first" (70), and "was attracted to what she thought were weaknesses in the trickster" (71) seems to feel attracted by Griever and what she perceives a certain frailty about him but is misled about his racial heritage. This is made clear when she is described later as a "hereditist, withstands miscegenation, and neither speaks nor listens to people that she determines are mixedbloods … She did not know about the racial identities of the trickster" (77). With these words we are made aware that under Hannah's eyes and to her perception, Griever is as white race as she is. In stark contrast, Colin Gloome insults Griever, calling him a "mongrel swine" (96). The narrator goes on to deliver in all seriousness and detachment the logic behind Hannah's racism:

> Hannah, however, does not celebrate her racial insecurities at random; indeed, her racialism is formal and methodological. For example, she is hostile to miscegenation because she believes that mixedbloods are inferior. "Mix oil and water and you end up with neither," she argues, but her metaphors are seldom as persuasive as her research summaries; her racialist bone of contention is based on distorted demographic information … "Even so, when people can be recognized for what they are, then they do better in the world. Jews, like Chinese and other races, achieve more and earn more in those countries where there is discrimination, but not mixedbloods because no one knows who they are. Mixedbloods are neither here nor there, not like real bloods". (77-78)

It is as well that a couple of pages before, she has been represented as intolerant and loud: "Most people watched her first and listened later; indeed, she was asked to repeat words, sentences, even whole paragraphs, in casual conversations. The trickster watched her and remembered the social workers on the reservation" (75), meaning that Griever is aware of the kind of person Hannah is, before Vizenor makes the readers privy to her thoughts on race.

Coping with her criticizing the free market and the people in it, Griever answers her critics with a truth about minorities and the oppressed, in general:

> "Some people break their ass for nothing," said Griever.
> "Where?"
> "White Earth, even in San Francisco." (76)

Being Vizenor himself a mixedblood enrolled in the White Earth reservation and writing about a mixedblood who has been raised in a boarding school and relocated in his early teens (29), he lays before our eyes the paradox of Euro-Western methodology or "distorted demographic information" (77), following what Thomas King posited in "Godzilla vs. Postcolonial." The explicit reference to White Earth is telling.

The greatest irony resides in that for the Chinese, Griever is also the Other. A member of the group of Others that are the foreign teachers, the same kind of Other which happens to be non-Chinese. As a member of this collective, he also experiences racism from the Chinese because he is a *wai guo ren* (35), a *yang gui zi* (75): a 'foreign devil.' Conversely, as Griever reads this country against his non-Chinese perceptions, cultural translation or mediation has also a part in the novel since Griever's antics are explained by Hester Hua Dan and Li Wen, both students at the language institute, reading them against their own culture and translated as a representation in their language and culture – through the myth of Monkey King, thus further legitimizing his character as a transnational trickster. Smoothing communication in both sides, their translations are described as "polite" (86), and obtaining from them a direct answer sometimes proves to be taxing and give way for mistakes and comic situations:

> "She does not answer"
> "She must, that was my dream, tell her again."
> "No, she will not answer."
> "What did you say?"
> "Have you visited the market?"
> "Li Wen, please ask her if the opal is for sale."
> "She does not answer now."
> "Why not?"

> "Have you visited the market?"
> "Incredible, the cultural tolerance for repetition." (84)

In a clever pun, Vizenor makes a word play with Li Wen's repeated question about visiting the market to avoid answering him, with the resource of repetition present itself in the Chinese language. It is not a casual mention, since Griever has been learning Chinese, and Li Wen is acting here as his translator.

But besides being the Other among the foreign teachers, and the Other as a non-Chinese, Griever carries with him the Western representations of the Oriental Other, transforming the novel into another game about racism, thus adding one more layer of significance. He ponders about it and the labor of deconstructing these stereotypes, as he explains on his first letter to China Browne: "two exotic oldies with bound feet … I should have mimicked their miniature moves, by nature, but instead I carried their tattered bundles to the curb" (13). Respect is brought over his human relationships even when, admittedly, his first reaction would have been of mockery; there is a work done from the inside out and signals that Griever is aware of his flaws and tries to mend them. Remarks about the size of his nose (too big for being Chinese) and his height, which seems to be average Chinese - "he was short, not much taller than the students he would teach" (27) - place him into another classification. Again, is a "neither here nor there" situation, that alights in the most insignificant ways like "… in the high bathroom mirror. Even the sink is too high, the paranoid builders of this guest house must have imagined we were huge barbarians" (16); they all denote he is the non-Chinese Other, but Griever does not meet the standard for non-Chinese Other either and he cannot but feel the irony of the situation, even though it irks him.

Though despising the Chinese governmental bureaucrats for their adherence to the PRC's system, his descriptions of Egas Zhang, the evil cadre, delivered in first person, can be read as Orientalist: “Egas … smiles over each word … later, he asked me for deer antlers, bear paws, and gallbladders from the reservation” (15), relating to the image of obsequiousness of the Chinese, the fear of the Yellow Peril and their supposed penchant for strange aphrodisiacs that make up for the effeminate males, under the conceptualization of Orientalism. The peasant superstitions are used to obtain profit by selling this potent sexual medicine out of the legal commercial venues, most probably, and there we have another criticism towards the hypocrisy of the Chinese regime: on the one hand condemns these superstitions, on the other, the system allows that certain people in positions of power take advantage of these superstitions to their sole profit. On his first night in Tianjin, Egas gives Griever a cash advance – Chinese are known for being stingy, so it seems, and controlling about money, always ready to strike the best bargain: “He counted the crisp bills three times, bobbed his head in time, a hesitant kowtow dance, and scurried down the stairs like some rodent. Later, I mocked his sinister sidewinder smile in the high bathroom mirror” (15-16). Again, the obsequiousness and the money tropes, together with a characterization of a rat which recalls the image of cartoons were the Chinese were depicted with prominent frontal teeth. And the voice of the omniscient narrator engages further in this game “Egas Zhang, the furtive director of foreign affairs … held a cigarette close to his cheek, a pose revised from western movies” (65), a description which evokes those evil Asian characters in some films, torturers, triad-mafia bosses. A direct allusion to Egas’ own knowledge about the stereotypes of the Westerners, he uses his exoticism and the romanticized ideas of the teachers to his own advantage (66). Another example is the description of the elder cadres as Celestial Sages at a meeting, smiling politely “dressed in tunics and appeared wiser behind their practiced smiles” (180). It is through the omniscient narrator that we get to know how Egas Zhang is also steeped in racism, given that “he hated chickens even more than foreigners” (66) and considered them all as aliens (68). It does not help that Griever carries with him a rooster – referred to as "cock" in the novel, adding a sexual innuendo – freed from the market and that he starts a sexual relationship with Zhang's daughter. We are given examples of racism on both parts of the specter to destabilize our own perceptions about race.

The world of Griever in China is peopled with a wide array of characters that are not what they seem at first sight. Most of them end revealing a supernatural or magical side or they are first seen in premonitory dreams, to later appear in the narrative in Griever's real life, as postmodernist reincarnations of the pilgrims that aided Sun Wukong and Tripitaka on their quest. Trying to achieve trickster liberations, Griever fails to achieve the greatest liberation of all, that of the political prisoners that are being carried through the streets toward their public execution (153). Fox considers that this failure is due to the fundamental differences that exist between the two tricksters, the Native and the Chinese, being the last one wholly inscribed in Confucianism (81-83), which proposes filial duty and obedience, and Buddhism, two philosophies entrenched in obligation and duty, whereas the Native trickster does not suffer from the same dependance. This point of view leads Fox to determine that Vizenor's translation of the Native trickster into the Chinese trickster blocks the liberating power of the trickster when it encounters the cold reality of facts in China, lending a dark, ominous tone to the novel that paints a terrible picture on the future of human rights in China (71). On the other hand, Pearson proposes that the acts of the Monkey King in the Chinese epic reveal a political interest and a sense of political justice that is ever present in the Chinese trickster before and after being affiliated with Buddhism (367) and that Griever is Vizenor's avatar for Monkey King (369).

In the chapter titled "Griever Meditation," the fourth of the five chapters dealing with the liberation of chickens at the free market, we are taken back to the boarding school in a flashback episode dealing with the dissecting frogs in science lessons. Young Griever refuses to dissect frogs, exhibiting passive resistance and displaying alternative thinking: "Do frogs have science teachers? … Do frogs know who they are?" thus contesting the views of his teacher that, in the overall world of the frogs, the ones being dissected were a mere nothing, unimportant (48-49). Science lesson is paused by the recess but, on coming back, the frogs have disappeared, and Griever is accused and threatened with punishment:

> "Mark my words, little man, you will be punished for this," said the teacher. She snapped her fingers and ground her teeth.
> "Not by the frogs."
> "This is a scientific experiment."
> "Not by the frogs." (51)

Worth noting in this chapter, too, is the attitude of some teachers regarding their pupil. Apart from general considerations of their opinion about him, only two quotes are mentioned, reflecting each a different way of thinking. "'Griever has an unusual imaginative mind,' one teacher wrote, 'and could change the world if he is not first taken to be a total fool'" (49). This quotation recalls a teacher genuinely worried about academic development and with a great insight about the figure of the trickster as a young child, an appraisal seemingly not based on race and preconceptions. But it also recalls the primary difference between the archetypes of Fool and Trickster, since the Trickster is "everything the fool is only playing at being" (Lock 3), implying that the trickster in Griever can be mistaken by the fool. Further on in the same page, we are confronted both with racial bigotry and with harping because of Griever's unknown father (a traveler,[7] another minority subject to racism), all met with complicit silence:

> One teacher, a tall blonde … said, "The cause of his behavior, without a doubt, is racial. Indians never had it easier than now, the evil fires of settlement are out, but this troubled mixedblood child is given to the racial confusion of two identities, neither of which can be secured in one culture. These disruptions of the soul … become manifest as character

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[7] A Gypsy, as he is described in the book.

> disorders. He is not aware of his whole race, not even his own name." … The other teachers were silent in the thick blue smoke. (49-50)

Amid this complex interplay and weaving of racial stereotyping that destabilizes the reader, and though failing to achieve the liberation of the political prisoners, we have already been told that Griever achieved the liberation of the frogs from his science class (51), the Peking Nightingale (33), and a rooster and seventeen hens at the market (35). The rooster is named "Matteo Ricci" (38), an Italian Jesuit missionary (52) and one of the founders of the Jesuit China missions, the first European to be admitted at Forbidden City of Beijing, and whose great knowledge of Chinese culture and language allowed him to devise how to teach Christian concepts through Confucian ones, becoming a cultural mediator (Helstern 152, Criveller 769-770). The last two liberation acts resulted in the Peking Nightingale coming back to her cage (33) as well as several hens (53) out of their own twisted instinct of preservation. The fact that those liberations were not a hundred percent effective it is not an obstacle to point to a truth that may well be lurking hidden under our disappointment as readers – that a trickster or a cultural hero cannot perform certain liberation acts without the collaboration of those interested, and the cultural difference, the provenance or origin of the community to be liberated has to be taken into consideration. Griever could liberate frogs in the US, into a lower system of politics like a boarding school. The liberations in Tianjin become increasingly difficult, amounting to Peking Nightingale coming back of its own accord to its cage; Matteo Ricci the rooster (which is attained on a leash to Griever, ironically) and not all the hens of the market; and eight political prisoners (153), of which three refused to move towards freedom and the rest tried to escape, but were shot on site when found by the soldiers. This increasing in difficulty runs parallel to the societal and legal hierarchy, presenting an allusion to how much effort would be needed for these liberations to take place, as they become progressively more important and dangerous. A different country, a different frame of laws, a different level of politics. A trickster, Vizenor seems to say, can only do as much under certain circumstances. To do differently, they would be committing the crime of deciding by themselves the destiny of others, a paternalism that can be worse than the intended benefit, in the end. It would mean infantilizing the collective that the trickster is intent in liberating, as if they were unable or incapacitated for making their own decisions, and Natives know exactly what toll this kind of behavior brings about.

Vizenor's narrative is non-linear, chronologically speaking, with different points of view that jump from an omniscient third person narrator to a stream-of-consciousness, and the epistolary first-person narration. The Chinese epic, in contrast, has a highly formal structure, another difference that sets of the mechanisms of parody through difference, in Hutcheon's terms. The novel has no closure, and the last chapter is a letter to China Browne, as the first chapter was. Griever escapes Tianjin with Matteo Ricci (the liberated rooster) and Kangmei (the "moth walker") in an ultralight plane, after discovering the body of Hester in the pond. Kangmei is the "blond Chinese" (142) "mixedblood barbarian" (144) whose name means "Resist the United States" (141), and Hester's half-sister, born from their mother's adulterous relationship. Griever recognizes Kangmei from his first dreams: "I hitched a ride with a shrouded woman on a horse-drawn wagon" (18). She is a "moth walker, shrouded in silk" (170) that keeps [silk] moth seeds in bundles under her arms (165), and rides a horse cart, a "prairie schooner" (141). She is also the custodian of the birchbark scroll her father, Battle Wilson, an idealist Oklahoma-born Sinophile, stole from the British Museum (142). In a gender inversion, Griever as the Monkey King journeys to the West and out of China to Macao with Kangmei and the ancient tribal scriptures, transformed into a female Tripitaka carrying the wisdom of Buddha / ancient Native scroll. In the Chinese epic, the Buddhist scrolls acquired in the first instance were blank manuscripts, and the pilgrims had to ascend mountain Thunderclap again to reach the Buddhist temple, and ask for the written scriptures, as they thought they had been cheated on. In this second visit to the temple, they are told that those blank scrolls are "just as good as those with words" (Wu 4:353-354). Playing with our expectations, Kangmei's scroll contains a "marvelous recipe for blue chicken" (234). Besides, Kangmei is transformed as well into a new silk road since she carries silk seeds with her: "Kangmei knows how to raise silk worms and where to wild find ginseng, can you imagine silk farmers in the reservation?" (233), and besides the image of a new business developing in Native reservation's land renders Griever as a new Marco Polo as well. Ironically, the human Matteo Ricci first arrived at Macao, then a Portuguese trading post on the South China Sea, prior to travelling to China. As a Postmodern novel, it could not end differently, with them lost while travelling to the West, denying any master narrative that may ascertain a fixed meaning to their journey, except what was advanced in the first pages from Griever himself and that unexpectedly, laid before our eyes all the plot of the story right from the beginning:

> The fire bear told me some of the stories on the scroll, the histories of this nation, from the monkey origins to the revolutions, even the persecution of scholars, and the new capitalism, it was all there. But the future stories, what would become of this nation, she told me to read later. (18)

The last line of the novel strikes an optimistic note: "This is a marvelous world of tricksters" (235). It is telling that the only ones escaping the oppressive country besides the rooster, are two mixedbloods (Simal 164); if we bear in mind Vizenor's contention that "mixedbloods are the best tricksters" (Prologue, xii) and the increase of global migration, we can arrive to the conclusion that sometime in the future, the world will be populated by mixedbloods, transformed verily into a marvelous world of tricksters.

In an interview with John Purdy in 2004, Vizenor declared to this end that literary arts have the power to shake things up and strive for change if they act "fiercely, but compassionately" (Vizenor, Purdy and Houseman 216) and that Griever inhabits a "community reimagined, of Native interest being played out in the context of another great community" (217). Vizenor seems, if we conjoin the last line of his novel and these words, to deny the dark prophecies of an / any ancient nation lost forever, while at the same time expressing how his hopes are deposited in the common people, those peasants the cadres despised, the real people that inhabits the land, and in finding those things that bonds us all together instead of those that divide us.

4. Chinese American Trickster Strategies in Resistance: Maxine Hong Kingston's Western Monkey King

Maxine Hong Kingston is a first-generation Chinese American writer whose personal experiences as a multicultural person are reflected in varied ways in her novels. Much of the angst experienced growing up as a visibly racialized child in the US has been poured into *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, as well as the author's meditated answer to the ethnic and literary criticism her previous books had raised among a certain number of Chinese American writers, scholars, and readers. She has been accused of being a traitor to her heritage for marrying a white man, and of using the idea of exoticism the white race has about anything Asian to her benefit (Chang 19). That is, to play along with the stereotyping of Chinese as seen by whites, writing for whites and, in general, being a shame to all things that could be hold as sacred and truly Chinese. Perhaps her most aggressive critic has been Frank Chin (Chang 19), who has dedicated quite a few strong words to Maxine Hong Kingston and her writings, especially regarding *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976). He exposed his case in a lengthy article titled "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," published in 1990, where he denounces Christian thought and social Darwinism (8) as the maximum culprits of the pernicious acculturation (18) that Kingston shows, the former exerting a hegemonic influence whose ultimate goal is the extinction of the Asian race (25), and accusing Maxine Hong Kingston – among other Asian American women writers – of "boldly [faking] the best-know works from the most universally known body Asian literature and lore in history" (3). To legitimate this faking, he claims, she "had to fake all of Asian American history and literature" by claiming Chinese America "lost touch with Chinese culture" (3).[8] The accusations, coming from inside the diasporic community, are hard to take. As Cheung notes (237), a criticism on the part of the female Chinese Americans regarding the patriarchal order of their Chinese culture was taken as a betrayal to the Chinese American male community, whose hardships and struggles to forge a strong community they felt were rewarded by being eroded by the enemy within. Even so, Kingston's work is greatly admired by other Asian and non-Asian writers and scholars because of her innovative merging of Chinese folklore and contemporary narrative to give voice to some of her main concerns as an American citizen which are pacifism, feminism, and reclaiming America also for minorities – namely, reclaiming her space in America and in the world, by extension – as an American writer (Zeng 1). Kingston, in an interview with Shirley Geok-lin Lim in 2006, declares herself a political person with political and social concerns (Lim 165), who writes employing all the references of her background, and acknowledging that those references are nowadays coming from all cultures (Lim 166).

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[8] See also Judy Huang entry on Chinese American "Authenticity" www.dartmouth.edu/~hist32/History/S08%20-%20Maxine%20Hong%20Kingston%20-%20Frank%20Chin%20Debate.htm, and Edward Iwata's article "Is it a Clash over Writing…" www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-06-24-vw-1117-story.html

4.1. The Anxiety of a Split Identity

Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book is a novel written from an omniscient third person narrator “rather intrusive, in a 19th century novelistic style” (Simal 159), hybridized with dialogue parts where the characters are given space to talk with each other, thus offering the reader a different nuance of their personality – though mediated, via the author’s intention – as well as a respite at the sometimes overwhelming rantings of Wittman Ah Sing, as he travels through life and through America trying to overcome his anxieties as a Chinese American. Some of his thoughts are presented in a stream-of-consciousness style that crashes with the reality that he perceives and that is described to the readers shortly after, depicting before our eyes how these different modes of perception work and seemingly complement or decry one another. This clash between what Wittman perceives and his surroundings are the translation into the text of the pulls he feels inside.

The novel is set in the 1960s period, one of the most conflicting decades of the recent history in the US, which was juggling not only with its presence in wars abroad but also with the reclamations made at home in the name of the minorities, mostly Black Americans, and the fight for civil rights, “a time when some events appeared to occur months or even years anachronistically” as Kingston clarifies in the page that comes after the one dedicating the novel to her husband. A turmoil of social unrest that saw the birth of a movement committed to fight for equality for all Americans. Against the background of a US striving to keep up with times while evolving towards the end of the century and out of the World War II and the Cold War era, Wittman Ah Sing, a Berkeley English major imbued with pacifistic and leftist ideas, who marries Taña De Weese in order to dodge being drafted, strives to bring his conflicting identity to a balance. Wittman’s inner world seems possessed by different strains of thought that collide in what it could be perceived as a game of excluding opposites. As a fifth generation Chinese American he is acutely aware of racism towards the Chinese migrants in everyday life, in pervading US bureaucracy, the weight of the social class – not only among whites but also among other races and especially among the Chinese –, and the intersecting spaces in between. This awareness renders him extremely touchy to the racism directed towards him, to the point of always double guessing what has been said and why it was said, while at the same time being oblivious to his unerringly racist attitude towards not only other races but to new Chinese migrants, to whom he derisively refers with the racial slur of "F.O.B" (fresh off the boat): "F.O.B. fashions … Can't get it right. Uncool. Uncool. The tunnel smelled of mothballs – F.O.B. perfume" (5), mocking with superiority their being so patently uncool, so unsophisticated, so Other vs his more sophisticated American attitude.

Just a year after graduating from Berkeley (as Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston did), and though contemplating suicide as the novel opens, Wittman Ah Sing dates beautiful Nanci Lee, "The Face" (24), a former fellow student at Berkeley. Extremely aware about race and ethnicity, and playing at the same time with the trope that all Asians look the same and with the interplay of surnames that could pass as Asian or non-Asian, he considers Nanci Lee's origins: "She's maybe only part Chinese – Lee could be Black or white Southern, Korean, Scotsman, anything – and also rich" (12); this means that he is also acutely aware about class, too, intersecting with race: "Nanci Lee and her highborn kin, rich Chinese-Americans of Orange Country," and to physical appearance: "she hadn't paid attention [to him]. Though she should have; he was more interesting than most, stood out, tall for one thing, long hair for another, dressed in Hamlet's night colors for another" (12). In these lines he is expressing his care about visual representation – tall for being Asian – and the more general frustration of not engaging Nanci's affections. In Wittman, at least at the beginning of the novel, we are encountered with a young character member of an oppressed minority that has internalized racism, which in turn mediates his social relationships, and his ethnical persona clashes with his cultural persona (Liu 9). His identity is split between the pride of being Chinese, the self-deprecating tone in which he speaks about himself and anything Chinese, mocking the way Chinese migrants speak a broken English – identified as Chinglish by Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien (qtd.in Shaw 184), and a class conscience of being separate and different from the new migrants, but an inferior to the Lees for example. His self-consciousness and perpetual double-guessing intrude in his date with Nanci: "Is she stereotypecasting him? Is she showing him the interest of an anthropologist, or a tourist?" (13). By placing the words "anthropologist" and "stereotypecasting" close to each other, I am strongly reminded of Thomas King and Vizenor, actively denouncing how Natives are seen as souvenirs of times past, placed into museums by anthropologists, their image (representation) fixed, like in a diorama. When she starts telling him about her childhood, he is still suspicious and uses what I can only describe as "interchangeable" Asian stereotypes, borrowing one Asian stereotype to describe another, and throwing his own sexism into the mix: "What's this? She doing geisha shtick for me?" (17) – which certainly reads to me as "is Nanci, a Chinese American, playing the Japanese geisha Orientalist trope on me, another Chinese American? How offensive is that?" Nanci, oblivious to his suspicious train of thoughts, can see through him and uncovers the anxieties he suffers while trying to tick all the boxes of Chinese, American, and Chinese American representation as if they were separate: "I know your motive for wanting to see me … You want to know how you were seen. What your reputation was. What people thought of you. You care what people think of you. You're interested in my telling you" (18). To his displeasure, she had thought he was a conservative (Chang 27), even when he dated white or Black women (18). Even worse, he had not achieved anything worth to catch her attention: "He had talked for four years, building worlds, inventing selves, and she had not heard" (19). There is an ambiguity present in the expression "inventing selves," implying those he built because he is a playwriter and a poet, and those used as a convenient disguise, switching places – so to speak – when he needed to be the American Wittman, the Chinese Wittman, or the Chinese American Wittman. All his exertions trying to fit in have turned Wittman into a paranoid, whose reacting buttons are pushed when somebody else picks up his modus operandi of being self-conscious and turning the racism against the Chinese. For example, at Nanci's mention of the racial denomination of "ching-chong-chinaman," his mind wander on the loose: "Did I hear wrong? Hallucinating again? She mean me? Who you talking to? … You talking about me? Am I too paranoid or what? She hadn't called me a name, had she? Someone called her that?" (23). The explanation is offered right after his paranoid rant, and we readers are educated as well in the bargain: "She meant she refused to read a grotesque whose bucktoof mouth can't make intelligent American sounds" (23), a darkly comic image of a beautiful Nanci Lee with buck teeth dropping her lines in broken English and being asked to "act more oriental" (24). Kingston ends the education by saying "As if this language didn't belong to us," pointing at one of the reasons why minority writers usually choose to express themselves in the English language, not to exclude people but to reach as much audience as they can, being the English language considered as a lingua franca, and to reclaim agency in the eyes of those that hold the power of representing. As Kingston expresses, "I write from the language that I hear. This is an old American tradition from the very first writings of the Transcendentalists … But my American language is spoken by Chinese speakers" (Lim 162), its being overly informal and informed of interferences of the Chinese language does not negate its provenance, eminently American.

Wittman's acculturation, the American part of his Chinese American identity, is patent from the profuse references to Western canon literature, the most salient being his own name with the strong reminiscence of the "quintessential American poet" Walt Whitman (Tanner 62) and his poem Song of Myself (Tanner 61). The novel also names quite a new writers of his era, and a staggering number of references to popular culture, and is also filled with direct and indirect allusions to Shakespeare, Hemingway, cowboys, and Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1), Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth in *The Lady of Shanghai* (5), *Carmen* French opera (7), Rainer Maria Rilke (8); and Whitman, Saroyan, Steinbeck, Kerouac, Twain and Robert Luis Stevenson, Muir, Stegner, Fante, Bulosan (to name just a few) mentioned in just one paragraph, the names stringing out of Wittman's mind while he devises the idea of having a reader that would entertain the passengers of – what Walt Whitman called "classless society" (9) – the railroads throughout the West, by assigning a writer to each leg of the trip. But literature and popular culture, both Chinese and Western, are not the only concerns, there are also quite a number of political allusions, specifically to World War II and the Vietnam War, a war he is keen in avoiding as his friend Lance Kamiyama has done by marrying a white American woman (144). Wittman declares himself anti-war (47 and 235, for example), he ponders about the Civil Rights Movement (52), and he reflects on an America that seems to be defined by a excluding black / white race opposition (Shaw 182) that occupies all the space, leaving all other races out. To this end, Kingston, in a conversation held in 2004 with members of the Charles Johnson Society and Charles Johnson himself, dealing with Buddhist philosophy and its relationship with artistic expression (Whalen-Bridge 69), explained that:

> we people who are non-black, non-white, we have a very special sight because the whole discussion during the 60s was about black and white. And from our point of view with "Where am I in this?", and the answer was just like so complicated because you have to make your place in it. You *know* that the question is not black and white. It's not *only* black and white. And so it's making your own place, but also making your vision known And it's a vision of non-duality … Wittman and I, we were aware, yes, of the Beatles and Woodstock *and* the civil rights movement ... And Vietnam … I'm writing America. (Whalen-Bridge 79-80)

Wittman tries to find a place for himself and make sense of the opposite forces that are present in his own self: "What's wrong with him that he keeps ending up in Caucasian places? Like the English Department?" (57). Losing his job at a department store, he signs up in Unemployment and the treatment dispensed by the civil servants has him up the wall. Failing Wittman to provide an i.d. such as a driver's license or a credit card, the woman at the registration desk asks for his passport (227). Because of his anxiety as a visibly racialized minority, his first reaction is to get offended: "What's this? Is she calling me a wetback?" and to reply haughtily "I'm not going anywhere." It does not really matter that he has no personal identification on him, except his Social Security number and, that by failing to provide any other proof of identification, the last resort would be a passport. But the real racial offence, just alluded to in the registration desk incident, is waiting after this ambiguous exchange, in the interview with the Employment Counsellor, a "Mexican-American guy about Wittman's age" (239):

> "How were your grades?" Your G.P.A.?"
>
> "Not bad. Not too good."
>
> "Did you get a lot of Cs? You got a lot of Cs, right?"
>
> "Some."
>
> "I thought so. Those were Chinese Cs."
>
> "They were what?"
>
> "You haven't heard of the Chinese Cs? The professor I t.a.'ed for told me to give guys like you the Chinese C, never mind the poor grammar and broken English. You're ending up engineers anyway."
>
> "I wasn't an engineer major. What do you mean? Do you mean they kept me down to a C no matter how well I was doing?
>
> "No, they were raising you to a C. They were giving you a break who couldn't learn the language. They were trying to help out, get the engineering majors through the liberal arts requirements." (241)

Thus, the unemployment and educational systems play racist games on Wittman, who is becoming Otherised in a very patronizing way by an-other Other, that happens to work for those very systems. As Thomas King looked at the Mexicans of Roseville (*The Truth* 37-

39),[9] so Wittman is looking at the Other – the Mexican American Employment Counsellor, and this Other is bringing all his assumed representations about the Chinese into play, too. The dejection and the offence are huge, destabilizing his own worth: “Monkey powers – outrage and jokes – went detumescent at the enormity of the condescension” (241); not only his grades were devaluated because of assuming he would have needed any help with his supposedly broken English, a huge paradox given that Wittman has a major in English, he was also assigned the engineering stereotype of how well Chinese fare with math and science. And at the same time, it uncovers the play on native-born Chinese Americans and new migrants, being that the former would have inferior grades even if they deserved better than a C, just because they were assumed at face value as new migrants. Kingston weaves these stereotyping games in different levels, surprising the reader with the depths the different meanings acquire in this accumulation tactic.

The issue of split identities is mentioned several times in the novel, most notably and in cue with the view that one part cannot live without the other. Wittman narrates the time he volunteered for a paid experiment in college, advertised for Chinese Americans: “So … Chinese-hyphenated-schizoid-dichotomous-Americans” were gathered in a classroom where they were asked to fold a paper in two, add a header (Chinese / American) to each half, and assign the words they would hear to one column or the other. Wittman declares he should have tried to stop the experiment right from the beginning, but instead played the trickster and wrote under the Chinese header the “Star Quality” positive words. His attempt proves futile because – let us remember this was an experiment solely intended for Chinese Americans – his answers, while purposefully trying to create a deviation, were swallowed up by the standard deviation the rest of the tests presented. That is, the Chinese Americans had internalized those stereotypes to the point of believing them as a universal truth, with the ironic result that the scientific report for the experiment sustained and perpetuated the exact same negative labelling. Kingston is playing jokes on us, mixing the test results with the visuals that help understand the complex weaving of the tissue that it is a multicultural identity: "It's scientifically factual truth now – I have a stripe down my back …Check out the yellow side, and the American side" (328). The power of signifying is also described when discussing derogatory terms used for multicultural people by their own community, effecting a further negative oppression: "What signifies a banana? If I were Black, would I be getting an Oreo? If I were a red man, a radish?" (315) – where the term banana stands for an Asian who is yellow on the outside, meaning visibly racialized but white in the inside, completely assimilated; the Oreo would be the analogous for Black people; and the radish for Natives. Or, as King described in *The Truth About Stories,* an apple which is "a derogatory term for an Indian who is red on the outside and white on the inside" (67). We are back at the representational games that are played with words, that add to the idea of edibles and food ready to eat, the idea of being too much white for your own good whether you are Asian, Black, or Native. A commodification of an idea, up for popular consumption. Stereotypes gain in communicative force and thrive through oversimplification and reductionism. Wittman, throughout the novel is depicted as trying to fight these representations by proclaiming he is the contemporary Chinese American trickster: "I am really: the present-day USA incarnation of the King of the Monkeys" (33), a new kind of trickster that embodies a new type of person, a mixed-culture one. Making use of what Begoña Simal describes as "literary tricksterism," Kingston deploys his struggles and his quest toward achieving this status in the mode of her narrative.

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[9] As mentioned previously in this MA thesis, page 18.

4.2. The Gender Divide

While Wittman is a Wit-man and the main character of the novel, which in turn is a fake book about Monkey King – fake stated boldly from the start –, the truth is that he is surrounded by women that help him grow out of his anxieties, starting with his creator and down to the smart old lady he meets at the Unemployment office. Kingston, a female writer, employs her creative powers to serve us with a male trickster turned into a tool for her purposes as a feminist (Morgan 121), although her efforts have been misinterpreted – as it has happened with Frank Chin (9) and other critics. Kingston argues that whenever critics label her work as Asian American or Chinese, she feels their labels are used to further entrench a divide between China and the West by negating what is happening in America, and that this happens "especially with feminism" because the issues she rises in her works are being put down solely to the way women are treated in China, forgetting that she is "talking about the way we're treating women right here" (Whalen-Bridge 80); in a few words, her works are read as Other to Western culture, and pertaining to the Other as opposed to men, and not inscribed in contemporary American history, or global contemporary Western history by extension, with regards to feminism.

Wittman comes across as a young man who has several issues with women, as a collective. All his efforts about fighting racism and injustices fall short when his sexism is up and about. This way of pointing out such shortcomings is a reminder of how patriarchal cultures still dominate the representational arena. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, the author describes the situation many women of diasporic origins face, the double bind that makes them less than white in the first instance, and less that their male ethnical counterparts, in the second. That this character is created by a woman writer is what it makes the difference between male / female meaningful, especially when Kingston does give voice to Asian male representational issues as well. Adding to the stress of being perceived by the white gaze as the Other, Wittman also experiences the white emasculating gaze of the effeminate Oriental trope, the submissive, the wife. The pervasive belittling representation of the Asian male as not virile, as feminine, hovers over him and the fact that he fights the femininization of Asian men does nothing but enhance, as well, the troubles of all women in this game of excluding dualities.

On the episode where he is at the Unemployment Office, he stumbles into an old Chinese lady, injured from her work at a cannery. His initial contempt towards her and her "shuttling scuttling weaver of Chinese and English" (228) derives soon in sympathy as he perceives her to be ignorant, innocent about work and unemployment laws – "he was breaking the news to this innocent" – that may left her out of the system without nothing to sustain her: "to hear her think to surrender stuck a pain into his heart … Enough Unemployment counseling; the Government can do its own dirty work" (230). The old lady in turn helps him fill in his card the right way, passing her knowledge onto him to help him obtain the Unemployment dole: "I´ve been coming to this office between seasons for years, so I know. They give us the same test questions every week, and we have to give the same answers … I teach you" (231). She answers his questions with advice and the knowledge she has acquired from experience, like referring to white people as *Sai Yun* "instead of White Demons [to show] the classiness of the speaker, and also gives the Caucasian person class" (231), a respectful denomination that skims over negative stereotypes for both parts and enables a better communication.

Nanci Lee, his unattainable love, can see through his insecurities and provokes him on their first and only date. They had gone over to his flat and he recited some of his poetry to her, a poem about the duplicity of perceptions regarding the birth of a Chinese baby and the possibility of being afflicted with Down syndrome, a physical likelihood brought about by the baby's physical appearance, most notably slanted eyes and flat noses: "'What's wrong with the baby, doctor?!' 'Is it deformed!?' 'Is it Chinese?!' … 'But *we're* Chinese.' 'He's *supposed* to look like that!?' 'How can you tell if it's defective or it's Chinese?'" (31), the words "wrong," "deformed" and "defective" accumulate such a negative charge that the poem turns not only racist but also ableist. After reciting the poem, Wittman asks Nanci her opinion about it, and she answers that he "sound[s] black … like a Black poet. Jive. Slang … Like…like Black" (32). Her answer infuriates Wittman, who starts behaving like a trickster monkey, trying to reclaim his Chineseness, his authenticity. "His head turned from side to side like a quick questioning monkey … He picked a flea from behind an ear – is this a flea? – or is it the magic pole … that the King of the Monkeys keeps behind his ear?" (32). Confronted with her criticism and perceiving it directed to the anger-ridden poem, he reacts slamming his hand on the desk, spitting in a spittoon, and jumping and behaving like a monkey on top of the desk, sniffing pages of poetry and discarding them as "too Black" (32) until he finds and recites another poem in Chinglish "'Wokkin on da Waiwoad. Centing da dollahs buck home to why-foo and biby. No booty-full Ah-mei-li-can ga-low fo me. Aiya. Aiya.' … "Angry." "Angry." "Imitation of Blacks." … "Angry no goot. Sad. Sad. Sad"" (33). Taken aback by the force of his demonstrations, Nanci leaves in a fright. Through this exchange, Wittman is verbalizing the conflicts of the non-whites and non-blacks, as Kingston explained, and draws on a certain type of Chinese American literature that is much entrenched in being nostalgic while recounting at the same time the different stages of Chinese migration: the sojourners, the railroad workers, their impossibility to bring their families to America and be reunited again, the formation of bachelor men communities that derived in Chinatowns. And the silence that covered it all up, not allowing them to express their anger, as if it was something to be ashamed of. Always the meek migrant, as opposed to the combative Black Americans. This episode follows Wittman's earlier thoughts about why there seemed to exist no Chinese American jazz, blues and "ain't-taking-no-shit-from-nobody street-strutting language" (27). This incident with Nanci reveals that he is trying to cope with his anxieties by imitating Black American strategies in American society, as a way of signifying himself. As Shaw understands it, Black "nationalist organizations and aesthetic movements deployed militantly confrontational rhetoric and performative styles" (182-183), and it becomes clear that Wittman is influenced by these movements. But still, he is an Asian American unconsciously caught in the black / white axis, and the episode with Nanci marks the moment of realization in which a woman opens his eyes to this influence and positioning, allowing Wittman to find a voice of his own to articulate his identity.

The family circle of women, composed by Wittman's mother, the adopted PoPo (grandmother), and his mother's friends, also exerts its influence, and helps towards enabling Wittman to overcome his anxieties. Though they are mostly critical about his appearance – long hair, moustache, and beard – and about keeping company with Taña De Weese, a non-Chinese American, they all come to his aid and contribute towards his great American play act. Ruby Ah Sing and her friends are "glamour girls of World War II" (181), a jolly gang of women who display a strong sense of community and do not give the impression of being subservient to men, thus presenting a different image of the passive and meek Asian women. These women are boisterous, strong, and poke fun at him at a rate that makes him invoke protection inwardly: "O King of Monkeys, help me in this Land of Women" (184). These women reclaim a space for themselves in Wittman's narrative and their stage experience help Wittman make it to the premiere of his play. His grandmother, who we discover is a Japanese refugee that "showed up one day, and we took her in … At New Year's, she doesn't go to the post office to have her green card renewed, so either she's an illegal alien or she's a regular citizen" (193) has disappeared, being abandoned by Wittman's parents in the Sierras (263). Wittman finds her by sheer luck, while she is crossing the street, and she proceeds to explain to him what happened. A damsel in distress, like in a fairy tale but defying ageism, she was rescued by an old Chinese man that happened to drive by and heard her weeping at being abandoned. He picked her up, drove to Reno, and got married (265-266). Thanks to this marriage, his grandmother has come to an affluent position and can ask of her husband some money to invest in the play Wittman is writing.

At a party at his best friend's house, Wittman meets Taña De Weese, whom he presently marries (163) even when the greatest motive is not love but saving Wittman from the draft. Taña develops a strong bond with him and is shown to be a thoughtful person with a transparent personality that does not show that kind of behavior Wittman's dislikes, such as asking him to "say something Chinese" (191); she is agreeable and she is not racist, since "she has an expression on her face like she's appreciation whomever she's looking at" (336). Introduced to his family circle of women, she is presented first as his friend, not his wife – until the newlyweds take their leave to find the grandmother. Her thoughtfulness is shown when she checks consciously her own expressions regarding Wittman's mother and her friends: "they are still pretty, and want to show it off. I'm sorry; I'm not going to say 'still pretty' about old people anymore. That's like … 'He's hard-working – for a Negro'" (190). As his wife, and as a working woman, she turns the expected balance of power upside down, subverting the idea of the traditional family, especially among the more traditional Chinese culture. Besides, she is acutely aware of the rampant sexism at workplaces, as she explains how the men at her company are rewarded more benefits, get better paid and do not have to account for the hours spent out of the office because "they eat with clients" (219), as opposed to the strict time control her company exerts over its female taskforce, their dress code, make up and their family planning, getting fired if they get pregnant (220). The hypocrisy of the company "congratulating themselves for giving [them] a girl's lounge" (218) when they are nearly not allowed to take a sick leave, the difficulties of speaking up and being labelled as a communist for suggesting they should create a union and being reported to the American

Legion for that suggestion. Kingston denounces the way women are treated unequally in America through Taña, a white woman. But she includes also Chinese American women, by having the thoughts of Wittman on the matter open to us: "Wittman hoped that those scared office workers … weren't Chinese Americans girls. Most likely they were, and Claudine was too" (219); as she herself expressed, Kingston wants to make it about the way women are treated in America (Whalen-Bridge 80).

By the end of the novel, Taña has refused silently to do any household chores since Wittman does none, expecting her to do so while maintaining her full-time job. The things between them in the apartment where they live have got to a point that can only be described as barely managing to avoid getting drowned by garbage, by the way Wittman describes the state of the apartment, with rooms crowded with things and dirty dishes piling up waiting to be washed, and the quickly deteriorating state of their relationship:

> We've been running all over the apartment churning up the newspapers and cat shit, yelling at each other … I've never believed that Caucasians are dirty, but. Her place wasn't a dumpyard when I first went over there. Cleaned up for visitors, I guess … I won't ask her to clean up … Domesticity is fucked. I am in a state of fucked domesticity. I am trying for a marriage of convenience, which you would think would make life convenient at least. (338)

While Wittman does not ask Taña to clean up, he surely expects her to do so. Wednesdays are the days to take out the garbage, and though she says it aloud intending him to take the hint, he in turn expects her to take the garbage out on her way to work (338). He is guilty of inaction regarding to the cleanliness of the apartment, of trying to maintain an attitude of not being really involved in the marriage, and of no cooperating towards a communal wellbeing. It also reveals the added burden women face when working outside from home as opposed to being a housewife. They are not expected to choose an either / or position, duty dictates they should be taking both. There is also a pull and push between them; Taña is the one that wants to specify the terms of the marriage and when Wittman phones her to invite her to the reading of his play, Taña affirms that "I do want to be married to you, but I don't want to be the wife … There's a certain proposal that I want from a man. He´ll love me and … he'll say, 'Taña, let me be your wife'" (272); the proposal does not go as Taña expects it, because Wittman is surprised about her request "You want me to be your wife?!" and later concedes "Wait, wait. We take turns. I want a wife too sometimes, you know" (273). Taña proposes, or so it seems, a total reversal of traditional roles, one that proves to be too much for him. Wittman's public act of surrender, at the end of his play, still reveals traces of his anxieties as a man that cannot cope with such an independent woman, and that he has not kept his side of the bargain: "I'll clean up the place, I get the hint. You don't have to be the housewife. I'll do one-half of the housewife stuff. But you can't call me your wife. You don't have to be the wife either" (339). The power balance on their relationship is achieved by taking the wife, the passive and negative "less than" meaning, out of the equation. The end of the novel also provides a thwarting of an expected epic-romantic ending, making it more down to earth and realistic (Narcisi 109), and with the audience and players – except Taña and Wittman – misconstruing Wittman's words and celebrating a wedding when the couple is at the verge of a divorce (Cheng 28).

Throughout *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston leads us together with Wittman, the Chinese Monkey trickster, in his personal journey to the West, where he starts to understand how to occupy the in between spaces that the frontier black / white has carved into the American society. To do so, he needs to admit he is a hybrid born of two different cultures but educated into a hegemonic one, the American, that has permeated his self and threaded with the Asian one; his previous split identity has developed from a game of excluding opposites, to a pattern of threaded levels of being which functions by cooperating instead of warring. And to reconcile his patriarchal sexism with his fighting for fair causes. The novel, as a fake epic, follows an anti-hero, an imperfect mortal who tries to achieve epic Monkey trickster ways but gets blocked by his uncertainties and anxieties. Kingston offers us, adding to the epic, a parody of a romance novel by depicting a very uncanonically romantic relationship between Taña and Wittman. Besides, she is actively trying to contest not only one hegemonic discourse, the Western predominant culture, but two, by adding the contesting of hegemonic discourse exerted by the writers and scholars who tried to policy what should be regarded as Chinese American culture, and to stifle over artistic creation. Trying to solve the "ethnic dilemma," Kingston turns to psychological and semiotical transformation (Zeng 2). She conceived her novel recalling the way Sun Wukong was trapped for five hundred years under a mountain by Goddess Kuan Yin, reclaiming for herself the role of the Goddess (Lim 160) to teach the trickster Monkey the way towards balance, and makes her presence felt in the novel in a meta-discursive way (Chang 29) by Wittman picking a figure of Kuan Yin and "shook her, shook himself as if she were doing it" (256). At the same time, Kingston inscribes her fiercest critic into the text since Wittman is also a representation of Frank Chin (Narcisi 100-101). While Frank Chin writes about Chinese authenticity, proposing Sui Sin Far, Diana Chang and Dr. Han Suyin as writers with a knowledgeable and historically informed writers of Chinese fairy tales, heroic tradition, and history (12), he seems to obliterate the creative and subversive part of the art of writing and the independence of the creator. Trying to impose a way of writing about a whole collective by adhering solely to authenticity and tradition will not do with writers whose cultural upbringing has been intersected or colonized from within, besides limiting the output of original works – as opposed to mere restructuring or recounting of fairy tales, tradition, and history, again and again. In this sense, the last three chapters of the book, dealing with the rehearsal and the premiere of Wittman's play, reveal how both cultures are merged into Wittman by recasting them into an objectively impossible performance – because of the sheer number of performers needed: a mix of the Chinese classic *War of the Three Kingdoms*, and odd minstrelsy show (Shaw 189) performed by Lance Kamiyama and Yale Younger Poet turned into Siamese twins Chang and Eng and biracial Bones and Jones, the Eaton Sisters delivering lines about identity and assimilation, Taña as Miss Sophie, drummers, puppeteers with their puppets, acrobats, dancers, his mother and her friends doing a no-War show, and fireworks. This impossible play is the metaphor for the evolution Wittman has been undergoing throughout the novel and how he starts to turn to an idea of community, from a fragmented -I to an all-encompassing I, entertaining a more dialogic approach to his own self, and by having a communal rapport with the audience that parallels the oral quality of *Journey to the West*. As Wittman declares, it is "The Journey *In* the West" (308), and the multivocality of the play signals the passage from his own concerns towards an acceptance of a communal identity where nobody needs to sacrifice their individuality (Narcisi 106). Wittman draws a full circle, he was born in a vaudeville backstage (13), being both parents in the theatre business, and his father dressed him as a monkey (196) to collect the money while he played the guitar. Wittman closes the circle by becoming the playwright and the actor of his own play. Ironically, the last chapter is called "One Man Show" while the whole novel has been, basically, Wittman's show. As a new Hamlet, the character whose choice of colors he usually wears (12), he performs his soliloquy to the audience: "Wittman, one of those who talks himself through fear" (97) expounds his vision of a new communal society on a stage. Thus doing, and among the huge noise the performances are causing in the neighborhood, with "fire engines coming, wailing louder than Chinese opera. On cue – the S.F.F.D. was bringing the redness and the wailing. Sirens. Bells … "The noisy part of our ritual is done"" (303), Kingston throws to the winds the silent model minority trope once more (Zeng 10). *Tripmaster Monkey* effectively demonstrates that through the major trope of border crossing, Kingston is breaking free from the multifaceted trap of either / or dilemma of women’s book / men’s book and feminism / heroism (Chang 22) and reclaims a space for herself as an American writer.

5. Conclusions

The consistent pattern throughout these works is that they consciously refuse to conform to the tunnel-vision of cultural stereotyping or representation, effected by hegemonic Western / white power over the communities they inscribe in these assigned representations. Writers and works twist and turn language and stereotypes into a dagger that is being thrown back at the reader, ambushing them and thwarting their expectations. As Margaret Atwood affirms about Thomas King, humor can be aggressive and oppressive, if we consider racist and sexist jokes, but it can also turn into a subversive weapon for those people who find themselves in extremely tight spots and nothing else to defend them with (244), and this affirmation can be extended towards Gerald Vizenor and Maxine Hong Kingston as well. Coyote, Griever, and Wittman as postmodern tricksters become semiotic tricksters and “comic holotropes,” even when this term is in origin applied to Vizenor’s postmodern Native tricksters since, in one way or another, all of them are “nexus of signs enjoining the speaker/writer with interpretive community” functioning at the level of language and representation (Smith 517).

Ballinger considers that Trickster’s transformation of the physical world has also social implications (18), and that their wanderings are a comic inversion of the mythic journey where social limits are deconstructed and, instead of affirming the greater social order, they threaten social disorder (20). That means that the master narrative is contested to reflect change and adaptation. This is proven true in the works studied, whether we are talking about King’s Coyote, Vizenor’s Griever, or even Kingston’s Wittman – though he is a non-Native character. Ballinger also notes that whenever Trickster’s sexuality appears in a story, it usually happens in stories in which the Trickster test or manipulates the social order, and where their sexuality becomes threatening (25-26). Such is the case of Griever, engaged in an affair with Hester that puts to the test the puritanism of the PRC and its policy of an only child, while at the same time denouncing the hypocrisy of a society that engages in a very profitable black market of aphrodisiacs and secret abortions. Or Wittman, who after trying in vain to seduce his ideal of Chinese American woman, embodied in Nanci Lee, changes his affections, and marries inter-racially to the initial reticence of his family and the general disapproval of the US society at a time when inter-racial partnership was still new and subject to open criticism.

My intentions at the start of researching this MA thesis were to find instances of humor and the twisting of meanings present in the texts, that could ascertain their political intentions under the cover blanket provided by the employment of the trickster figure. Entertaining multiculturalism in a community or in a person calls for a dialogic strategy that can take the form of dialogue between self-identity and outside perception, between text and reader, and between storyteller and hearer/reader. Both Native Americans and Chinese have a long-standing tradition of stories existing before they were committed to paper and written language. The *Journey to the West* is an epic that draws heavily from oral tradition too, so Native Americans and Chinese share this dialogic, oral quality – *orality* – that is also present in the way the story is told in the works selected, and / or paralleled by their intentions in the text. That is, it either uses orality as a technique, as it is clearly observable in the works of Thomas King, or refers to it tangentially by the way the narrative is deployed, as in the case of Gerald Vizenor and Maxine Hong Kingston, where the third omniscient narrator, though not interrogating directly the reader, falls into a rhythm reminiscent of a story being told. The concepts of *orality* and *survivance*, the last one specifically Native, can be applied to Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, though allowing for cultural differences. The Chinese diaspora is also fighting a certain vanishing trope that tries to fix them as a cultural curiosity entrenched in Oriental representation, and the silencing effected by the weight of the "model minority" trope. In the same spirit, and always allowing for cultural differences, it can be said that Monkey King is quite close to the Native trickster (Helstern 136). Even when the two tricksters cannot be one hundred percent interchangeable, there is a certain air of family in them that enables their swapping places and still drive the point – or the dagger – home.

Parody, as a form of humor and a language game, is also what links all these works together, attempting to come to terms with the weight of their past (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 29). Another link is the solidarity between communities. Since Thomas King, Gerald Vizenor, and Maxine Hong Kingston are painfully aware of the suffering of other minorities, their works and words show and share this feeling of compassion. and destabilize any preconceived notions about the master narrative of history, eluding historicism. Thomas King reflects on the trauma suffered by the Japanese in the US and Canada, while Gerald Vizenor commiserates on the people of the PRC, and Maxine Hong Kingston depicts regret towards other Asian minorities such as the Japanese and Vietnamese (270). In her deep analysis of both Vizenor's and Kingston's novels, Begoña Simal defines as "structural tricksterism" (158) the different overlaying techniques both novels present, and as "literary tricksterism" (143) the ways their protagonists – metaphorical tricksters themselves – cross and re-cross cultural borders through the narrative mode. As it is extensively proved, words and language games are paramount in developing and deploying strategies minority writers devise to resist hegemonic (mis)representations.

On 2020, the advent of the COVID-19 led to a surge of hatred directed towards the Chinese diaspora, that raised an international concern that was seconded by a huge support campaign with the hashtag #Iamnotavirus – and its Spanish counterpart #NoSoyunVirus. In 2021, still riding the pandemic, we have witnessed the murders of Asian women in the US, and the massive response worldwide of the #StopAsianHate movement. Canada's conscience has been struck by the findings of over 1,308 graves at residential schools where Native / First Nations children were buried due to untimely death, and many Natives are speaking about their own experiences at those institutions.[10] These events raise questions as to what extent behaviors we believed to be a thing from the past are gaining momentum again and replicate the same old stereotypes, rendering the analysis of the works by minority writers still important after all these years.

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[10] Read more at https://ottawacitizen.com/news/canada/how-canada-forgot-about-more-than-1308-graves-at-former-residential-schools/wcm/18d376d7-7abc-42b6-a459-d964dc7ca844

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